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Religion + Media I 99

Not Alone in a Crowd: Religion, Media and Community Connectedness at the Dawn of the Twenty-first Century

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Abstract:

Religion and media in America have intertwined each other in a variety of ways from the earliest decades of this country's democratic experiment. Moreover, religious organizations and those who participate in religion in this country have adapted themselves to the changing formats of media in ways that have brought cohesion and community to those who see religion and media as having ties to their identity in a media-rich society. The end of the Twentieth Century and the dawn of the Twenty-First bring hope that this intermingling of media and religion will not diminish and could grow in their connections.

This paper examines significant changes in use of media within this country's three major religions — Christianity, Judaism and Islam —in the late Twentieth Century and how each stands to further their uses of media in the next century.

Not Alone in a Crowd:
Religion, Media, and Community Connected-ness at the Dawn of a New Century

Walter Cronkite, in closing his autobiography with a lament, bemoans the "get mine" attitude of media profiteers who seem to have ditched traditional news for the fluff of info-tainment. The future looks bleak for those who care about hard news. Doesn't anybody care out there? Cronkite leaves readers with but vague hope: the cloudy media future could bring a return to journalistic purity if the public seizes the day (1996, pp. 374, 380). The people will have to want to inform themselves. If American media history is any indication, Cronkite need not have despaired. It can be argued that the American democratic experiment rode — and still rides for many — on an undercurrent of hunger for socio-cultural self-fulfillment by means of media information, much of that current stemming from a sense of the religious about life and its meaning (Olasky, 1988, pp.59-71; Pauly, 1997, p.9). It can be argued, moreover, that this hunger constitutes our collective hope in a transcendent order underlying news as it happens (Buddenbaum, 1998, pp. xiii-xiv; Gunther, 1988, pp. 279-287). Whatever the reason, Americans have for more than two centuries found ways of linking media and religion — media of all types, religion of varying descriptions — in ways that suggest they won't soon dispense with the mix.

Indeed, what sets American religion apart at the dawning of the Twenty-First century is the enormous capacity, heightened by technological advances, of religious leaders and followers in this nation to make media part of their spiritual self-identity — their guide in the journey of faith. Study of the ways communication has shaped the development of American religious life and culture over time has been too long neglected (Sweet, 1993, pp.1-3). This paper helps fill that gap, suggesting insights into change within American religious media applicable to students of American culture, religion and communication as they look toward upcoming decades.

Religious media examined in this paper will be that range of communication tools from newspapers and magazines, to television and radio, to feature films and internet communication which, within a perplexing sea of images and stories, has maintained a firm grip on the attention of those who care about faith and the pursuit of God. Recent research suggests that Americans want to believe as much as they ever did — at the same time craving a feeling of connected-ness, to each other and to the source of their faith, on their own terms. A Yankelovich study in 1996 indicated that Twenty-something Americans often feel discontented and disillusioned with the ways traditional religion treats their mobile, fluid lifestyles (Sparkes, 1996, p.43). But where media and religion connected creatively, such younger Americans appeared to be taking notice (Waters, 1996, p.41).

Linkage between growth in religion and media, of course, is not new. It can be argued that alongside the birth, dissolution or debate over any organized religion in recorded world history there has been an accompanying — perhaps a guiding — thrust of media. Preserved stories, narratives, images of a shared experience of faith drew humans into shared systems of tradition which anchored them as individuals to a culture of belief (Tanner, 1997, pp. 31-33). Some, such as Michael Schudson, note that such imaging, within late Twentieth Century American culture, is fraught with a tendency toward inflated and embellished memory. "Human beings treat the past as a real, contemporary force," argues Schudson (1992, p.2), and use it as a cognitive tool, a way of "thinking out loud" to themselves (p.14). If this be true of Americans dealing with the past, perhaps it could also be how they make sense of an uncertain future — including future-thought about religion. Historian Averil Cameron (1991), backed by sociologists Roger Finke and Rodney Stark (1992) suggests that within American religious history, the sharpest advances have come through those willing to connect faith and culture by means of media. Based on this premise, the dawn of the Twenty-first century can be expected to contain new variations of media advance within, Judaism, Islam and

Christianity — each of which will be considered in this paper's study.

Reality check? Religion still matters in American communication

Though myths abound regarding religiosity of America's colonial founders, it cannot be denied that they lived in a world filled with faith practices couched in presuppositions about media's usefulness for faith and practice. New cities and local governors took their authority from the Crown, and from the Lord — seen in media-informed leadership of the local parish. Moreover, at least some of the first inklings of a free press and freedom of inquiry in America derived from writings of a Puritan: John Locke (Latourette, 1975, p.978). The First Amendment's language, as but one prominent example of this, sets forth its radical notion of religious free-exercise and non-establishment in ways which hint at a high socio-cultural regard for public religion (Buddenbaum, 1998, pp.19-20). That debate about this clause still rocks the nation in socio-religious ways suggests a continuing priority in American society for religion and communication practice.

Researchers in the latter Twentieth Century appear to have ignored the important ways that religious commitment informs communication practice (Lulofs, 1993). Why? Maybe it's a given (Buddenbaum, 1998, xiii-xv); or maybe it's something we've never liked to admit or, even if we did, lacked the energy or inclination to describe in academic or popular media (Lulofs, 1993; Carpenter, 1984, 3). Or perhaps we've grown tired, in the West, of wrestling with makers of religious subculture whose power over implicit and explicit communication about religion has been a

centuries-old dynasty (Silk, 1998, pp. 3-11.) Whether we're inclined to research it or not, change in religious communication is coming as surely as is change in communications in other areas of American culture. And, as one researcher has noted, our grasp of this change is as important to our understanding of religion as it is to understanding ourselves within a communications-driven society (Hutchinson, 1963, p.13.)

Christian media in the next century: testing limits of cultural adaptation

Most visible in the next century, for a variety of reasons, will be change to Christian print media — that vast flow of narrative ranging from pocket tracts to slick magazines to glossy hardbound books. Christianity in America, due in part to its Western European origins, has roots in the printed word tracing to Gutenberg and the Reformation impulse to grasp knowledge of God — and the created order — with an individualistic wrestling of mind with heart (Purves, 1998, p. 7). Americans guard carefully their religious texts. Most carefully protected of them, from Christianity to Judaism to Islam have been reprinted sacred pieces written in antiquity. Whether it be a pocket New Testament or an ornamented copy of the Qur'an, no amount of revisionist religious fiction or popular religious media has been able to replace the socio-religious power of these original documents. Indeed, technology has been devised to make the un-tainted text of these writings available across the globe by means of audio-tape, compact disc and — in the waning Twentieth Century — by internet sites (Purves, 1998, pp.11, 17-19.) Such is the educational need.

And for a variety of reasons, the impulse toward Christian media cannot be separated from the impulse toward education — formal and informal — in religious thought within American all communities of faith (Wallace, 1991, pp.3-4; Longinow, 1996, p.53). Given this teaching function

of media, some

types of religious print media in decades to come can be expected to resemble print media of centuries past. Where such media begins to lose popularity, the reason -- rather than a waning interest in religion itself — could be that Americans, for the most part, have come to read and learn differently. Such has been the trend in the 1990s tracing to the beginning of the century. Thomas Leonard, noting newspaper readership, has observed that the U.S., at the end of the Twentieth Century, has made the shift from a nation of communal readers to one of isolated skimmers (1995, pp.220-222). Christian publications ranging from the more mature *Christianity Today* to Christian teen magazines and *Cornerstone* —publication of Jesus People, USA — have responded to the phenomenon by tailoring their products to the browsing audience.

A related challenge facing Christian media in American life of the next century will be the struggle for audience in a post-literate society. And it will be no small struggle. While it was the printed page — ranging from broadsides to broadsheet newspapers — that spread popular Christianity in the United States through the end of the Nineteenth Century and early decades of the Twentieth, the mid- to late-1900s became a time of diminishing popular interest in reading. Not that words didn't matter (Roof, 1994, p.77); rather, alongside reading sprang up a fascination with images — audio images by radio, filmed images on celluloid or, later, videotape, and still photographic images alongside text and graphics. It has been argued that the implications of new media will challenge previous assumptions about "the rational, autonomous individual" and could promote new ways of seeing the self within society — one constantly changing, driven by multiple identities being shaped by performative language (Poster, 1995, pp.58-59).

An ironic twist of media characteristics in the next century could be the priority on a new orality (Purves, 1998, pp. 28-31). What goes around comes around. And American Christianity, having moved from the spoken word to the written word over some 200 years, has during the 1990s responded to a devalued literacy by rediscovering the socio-cultural potential of recorded oralities in television, radio, film, and the lyrics of recorded music (Ong, 1982, pp.174-179). Such media innovations have perhaps the strongest precedent within American Protestantism, which traces to the very Reformation itself a drive to speak and sing its doctrines in language of the common people. Hence, evangelical Christians, in the early- to mid-1990s, could be seen pushing their way into mainstream recorded music by the pounding, swinging rhythms of such solo artists as Amy Grant and Michael W. Smith and by groups with such Biblically-connected names as "Jars of Clay." Evangelical Christian toddlers chortled at the video antics of animated vegetables acting out Biblical values in daily-life dramas (Miller, 1998, p. B1) and older children heard action stories — many of them following patterns of mid-century radio dramas — on such nationally-distributed radio programs as "Adventures in Odyssey"(Gerson, 1998, p.23; White, 1993). Growth of the "electronic church" phenomenon can be expected to continue —ranging from televangelism to televised worship — despite scandals which in the 1980s and early 1990s seemed to taint all but the most circumspect Christian broadcasters, drawing attentions of both cable subscribers and network viewers across the U.S. willing to pay to see it (Elvy, 1987).

Of course, such innovation has not only made socio-religious sense; it was simply good business. Christian young people — along with their Moms and Dads and grandparents — didn't just go to the mall more often in the 1990s; they went to Christian bookstores — places packed mainly with Protestant materials and glistening with marketing genius. Such outlets, in the late Twentieth

Century, have become a prominent socio-cultural and socio-religious niche within the American economy. As such, in the Twenty-first century, they can expect serious questions — from mainstream news media if not the Christian press — about the uses of Mammon in pursuit of the evangelical Christian Kingdom of God (Wuthnow, 1998).

Catholic publications and media, with an equally storied past in the U.S., have grown up through immigrant roots, post-immigrant stages, and into a late-Twentieth Century fragmentation touching much of American culture (Deedy, 1963, pp.68-69). Despite clear persecution at the hands of Protestant denominational leaders in the Nineteenth Century, Catholic media and education — having firmly affixed themselves on American socio-religious culture — can be expected to maintain this presence as the Twenty-first century approaches. The Catholic presence in American political life over social issues can be expected to continue and grow — the abortion controversy being one prominent example (Reichley, 1985, p. 293) — will likely continue in tandem with political involvements across denominations and socio-religious boundaries. Catholic clergy as characters in modern film have a storied past in American communication history of the mid-to late Twentieth Century (Keyser and Keyser, 1984).. It is an unfinished story likely to take on new twists as American cinema, along with television, continues its fascination with established denominationalism — particularly the liturgical — in American life.

In ways mirroring Protestant efforts in the 1990s, American Catholic church leaders and varieties of publishers — scholarly and otherwise — are reaching out to local communities with media ranging from radio networks to televised services to parish newsletters to book series' to stalwart denominational newspapers and magazines to web sites. In Chicago, a favorite online stop is www.holynamecathedral.org, a site living out the city's cathedral parish motto: "Celebrating the

Past, Creating the Future."

Indeed, nowhere in American Christian media — Catholic or Protestant — will there be more of a blending in the next century of spoken, musically-accompanied, and visually-illustrated media than in the array of Christian sites on the worldwide web. Here, followers of religion can expect to find faith-oriented text juxtaposed with still or motion pictures, audio images, music — or composites of all the above. Synthetic or not, this new media will create — as it has already — a heady impression that no distance is so great that an American believer cannot make the connection: be it with the thought and culture of a new prophet, or aliens on a passing space craft behind a comet. Rocket science? Not really. In fact, it's stuff we all know quite well. One scholar notes that the rules in this new world of hypertext will come from "a melding of the conventions used by advertisers, illustrators, comic book artists, writers, and programmers" (Purves, 1998, p.60).

Media, fundamentalism, and social action: forces to be reckoned with

But what about religious media with an attitude? Some have argued that radical religious groups in the United States — from both the left and right, and in all religions — pose one of the greatest threats to the democratic dialogue within American culture in the next century (Diamond, 1989, pp.231-236). Media of these groups, acting as a catalyst to cohesion among scattered believers, can be expected to gain momentum technologically and in target-marketing. Such media, ranging from

followers of Jerry Falwell to supporters of advancing Israeli interests, will likely continue to be readily available by means of both paper-and-ink publishing and internet sites. At the same time, emerging case law regarding the control of religious printed material, broadcast speech and internet

publications can be expected to bring further curbs on what types of communication are allowed. (Jackson, 1980). Yet as surely as judicial tests of religious media power can be expected in the next century, so too can greater diversities of that media. Such should not be surprising, for the history of Western media has been one in which the greater the ease of media access has become, the wider has become the diversity of media language — these languages growing up as a kind of insulation around socio-political and socio-cultural systems (Altschull, 1984, p.4).

The challenge, then, will be the ways media adapt themselves to fundamentalisms within American religions of all kinds — or how fundamentalists create and distribute media. It is a challenge that was inevitable: related in part to the very public nature of fundamenalism at the end of the Twentieth Century. Much depends, of course, on how one defines fundamentalism. If it can be seen as any religious group's orthodoxy wrestling with modernity (Pinnock, 1990, p. 43), then, by reason of late Twentieth Century American news values, fundamentalism will likely become, as one scholar put it, "a blue-chip stock in that massive industry of symbol production known as journalism"(Lawence, 1989, p.3). Accordingly, as the new century dawns, we can expect to see media images of extremists blasting abortion clinics or hurling condoms into church aisles. They're likely to be seen on both the evening news and on newspaper front pages as long as gatekeepers of news make these actions a point of high-profile coverage. It can also be expected in the religious media of fundamentalist groups whose theology laces destruction and bloodshed into their pursuit of social action, as seen in some strains of early Twentieth Century Christian Fundamentalism (Marsden, 1980, pp.210-211), Islam (Lawrence, 1989, p. 217) and Zionism (Cuddihy, 1987, p34).

Christian journalists, caught between the impulse to inform believers and the desire to pursue evangelical purposes, could be caught in the middle of fights over ideology that come up in their coverage — as has been the case with Pat Robertson's Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN) (Rose-Schultze, 1993, pp.415-416). Also in danger of cross-fire damage are college and university journalism programs seeking to prepare Christian journalists for both religious and secular media careers — a phenomenon noted by Schultze in comments about fundamentalist Christian higher education generally (Schultze, 1993, pp. 524-529). A key example of the phenomenon is the first-of-its-kind Regent University — founded in 1978 by Pat Robertson as CBN University — a graduate school which includes a growing college of communications committed to both credible journalism study and Christian values (pp.513-519).

Can we look for moral courage in the pursuit of religious media? Perhaps. And if it appears, the democractic experiment could be the better for it. Though some might believe, along with Greenspahn, that Americans "do not regard religion as important enough to fight for" (1987, p. ix), it could, on the other hand, be expected that Americans will seek out media and practice which explores the distinctiveness of their faith within their socio-political culture — and be willing, at least in some cases, to sacrifice to do it. As this happens, tensions visible at the end of the Twentieth Century between religious groups, Jews against Christians, Muslims against Jews, and the like, can be expected to continue. Where these tensions diminish, it will be as groups find ways of culturally blending their faith into the vast sea of American media expression. In this sense, assimilation, lamented by researchers of ethnic minority media (Riggins, 1992, pp.279-285), can be seen as part of a needed synergy within the democratic experiment (Moore, 1994, pp.264-265). Those American believers fed up with the tensions of established religion and its rhetoric — in any context — can be expected to craft an ideology of their own, built on one of the thousands of media strands available

in new media locations. Such could prove a challenge to traditional belief. Bellah cautions that perhaps the greatest threat American religion faces in the next century is that of radical privatization of religion — so much so that collective aspects of it disappear (1987, pp. 217-222).

Judaism

Jewish media in the United States — viewed from within Judaism — have been either nearly invisible or highly prominent within the American media landscape. This split image can be expected to continue into the next century as Judaism continues to redefine itself amid changing religious culture in the United States. Were it possible to describe Jewish media in one word (and to do so is risky), that word might be "fragmented" (Jais-Dobie, 1994, p.174). Though Christian media warrants a similar descriptor, fragmentation of Jewish media stems from the unique variations in ways that American Jewish culture has either assimilated itself or stood apart from surrounding communities of faith and culture (Handlin, 1979, pp.276-277).

Some of the ambivalence within conservative Jewish thought toward the place of media within Judaism has stemmed from whether popular media — in the American sense — is necessary to the pursuit of traditional Jewish faith. Silverman notes that media such as newspapers were not considered a cultural priority within conservative Jewish media until the Enlightenment, when the notion of Jewish commentary on current events and culture — within and outside Jewish communities — began to grow, and even then, quite slowly (1963, pp.128-129). Like American Christian media over the last century, much of the more mainstream orthodoxy within Jewish media emanated from the pens or under editorial approval of religious educational institutions — whether colleges, universities or seminaries. This is still the case in the 1990s, with some of the more accessible and user-friendly Jewish web-sites connected with educational institutions.

It can be argued that framers of the U.S. Constitution's Establishment Clause protecting American religion had at least a side-thought toward beliefs of those other than Christians. Jews were first granted religious toleration in 1740, in Philadelphia, (Copeland, 1997, p.27), and a marginal but persistent attention to media — tied to or paralleling attention to Jewish education — was growing through the next decades in cities as far-flung as New York, Chicago, and Cincinnati. Jewish culture spreading across the continent tended, at least in some cases, to build bridges rather than walls amid socio-religious culture surrounding it. But it was rarely easy. Part of the story of Jewish faith-practice in the United States is an unfortunate tendency among Christians to vilify Jews — too often in media — and urge their immersion into Christian cultural practice. Korelitz argues that Jewish newspapers aimed at fighting both assimilation and anti-Semitism (1997, p.75) as Judaism advanced into un-mapped western territories.

After 1914, a peak year in the growth of the foreign language press, about 1,300 newspapers and periodicals were being published. Of that group, about 1,000 could be classified as newspapers, and about 140 were dailies — about one third of them in German. Jewish newspapers — in Yiddish — comprised a well-read subset of this foreign language press. Among these was the labor press, especially available in large cities. The New York *Vorwarts*, or *Jewish Daily Forward* was established in 1897 by the Jewish Socialist Press Foundation (Mott, 1947, p.731.) Yiddish newspapers, though prominent in the period between 1920 and 1960, were steadily replaced by English-language Jewish periodicals through the post-World War II era.

Thus, by the 1990s, media such as *The Chicago Jewish News*, was among a host of Jewish publications across the nation serving not only subscribing and news-stand readers, but an increasing number of internet followers (www.chijewishnews.com.) *Chicago Jewish News*, a

tabloid-format publication, looks like any of a number of religious weeklies across the nation with feature articles, community announcements, obituaries and classified advertising. What makes it distinctly Jewish is its cultural fare — such as Jerusalem travel tips — and its window on how Jewish communities view popular American culture. In mid-December, 1998, its cover story was a four-page review of Steven Spielberg's then just-released film,"Prince of Egypt." The review, titled "Moses at the Movies," touted the animated work as an important one, telling "the story of our slavery in and exodus from Egypt." Alongside the write-ups were seven still-frames from the film — along with mug shots of Dreamworks co-founder Jeffrey Katzenberg and the film's director, Brenda Chapman. "Let my people go see this movie," admonishes the reviewer. A side-bar article to the lengthy review showcased Jewish characters in American films through 1998. Nice journalism. But is it kosher? Such contemporary interactions between Judaism and contemporary culture mark an attempt — suggested with some controversy by thinkers such as Martin Buber — that to counter alienation within Jewish life in America there must come a more culturally inclusive discourse, based in existential beliefs within Judaism (Silberstein, 1989, pp.72-74). Will we see animated vegetables acting out Torah-based stories for toddler audiences or Jewish-flavor music videos aimed at drawing teens into the religious fold? Not likely, say Jewish scholars, who argue that the agitators for better communications within Judaism — and likely the most visible outside Judaism — are known as restorationists, those who care deeply about preserving tradition within Judaism. Not to say Judaism eschews all innovation. Jewish believers, bottom line, await the Messiah, and "the interim is very long." Cultural refinement of religious practice, including uses of media, is part of that interim (Wieseltier, 1990, p.195)

Islam

Muslims, as communicators in the United States, can be seen as those who have sought cultural "space," but — as was the case with Judaism — have done so, through the 1990s, swimming upstream in an increasingly diverse media marketplace. Nonetheless, thanks to increasing dexterity with a globalized media and an increased willingness to make Islam "portable," Muslims in the United States have been able to create an increasingly-firm sense of identity for themselves (Metcalf, 1996, p.6). For the most part, American Muslims at the end of the Twentieth Century are professionals tied, in one way or another, into a global network of loyalties to religion, business and family. These linkages — albeit firmly rooted in traditions of ritual (Abdul-Rauf, 1983, pp.272-273) — are far from fixed, and have tended to ebb and flow based on factors as varied as fluctuations in the economy to events in Muslim homelands (Metcalf, 1996, pp. 1-2).

Though followers of Islam in the United States have at least attempted to build bridges with mainstream American culture in the late Twentieth Century, the exception — an outspoken one — has been the African-American population. Many of these believers, including those in prisons, have taken on an Arab identity in both language and custom in pursuit of Islam. An interesting phenomenon in the late Twentieth Century has been the rediscovery, among some black Muslims, of the life and example of Malcolm X, media-prominent follower of Elijah Muhammed. Since the 1960s, black Muslims have enjoyed more media presence — ranging from coverage of Louis Farrakahn (Singh, 1997) to news-feature coverage of new Mosques being built in various U.S. cities. Yet it can be argued that not all media coverage has been helpful. One observer noted in early

1999, that "as an American Jew, I see how the media often ill-treats the concerns of Muslim Americans, generally through basic misunderstanding of their culture (Ravnitzky, 1999). The comment, made by a law student familiar with American media practice — including investigative journalism — counseled journalists to better educate themselves in both Islam and Judaism. (He also urged Jews and Muslims to enter the field of journalism to add cultural insight to coverage of American religion.)

Muslims in America have suffered some of the same media vilification as Jews in the U.S — most recently in the wake of tensions in the Persian Gulf (Mernissi, 1992, pp. 1-8). Yet American Muslims have been able, nonetheless, to create a media base in the U.S. from which to build cultural foundations for their faith communities. So much so that, mirroring cultural effects seen in Spielberg's popular films, Islamic films are now available which portray the purity of Muslim lifestyles in juxtaposition with intruding foreign culture. In one such Turkish film, the scenario was one in which Muslim life was placed, favorably, alongside decadent post-Soviet-bloc Germany (Mandel, 1996, p.154.)

Just as Judaism can be expected to seek a sense of relevance for the pursuit of religious media in the United States in the next century, so too will Islam. Though there is a sense in which Muslims have sought a purity of cultural tradition linked with Asian and African regional practices, relevance has been a function of at least portions of their media. Young Muslims are "fluent in the popular culture of North America," observes one researcher (Schubel,1996, p.195.) Prominent, albeit controversial examples are the works of Salman Rushdie and editors of such trendy Muslim publications as *MuslimWise* and *Trend*. The latter, by playing with language in the difficult transliteration problem of Islam to American English, have invited readers to experience Islam amid

currents of competing popular culture. Some editors have even dispensed with the traditional Allah reference in favor of references to God — a term more universally accepted. The exception, since the 1970s, has been media of both traditional and African-American Muslims, who, as noted earlier, adamantly prefer Arabic names and terms in media language (Metcalf, 1996, xvi-xvii.)

Conclusion

Even if Walter Cronkite's fears about corporate-driven news bear out, there would appear at least marginal evidence that Americans in the Twenty-first Century will — even if they dispense with their evening news shows and daily newspaper — seek out media, somewhere, related to their faith journey. Religion and communication, inseparably linked by the presuppositions each make about audiences, meaning and community, can be expected to be part of the future of American socio-cultural change. Less certain is what this intertwining will look and sound like in an age when communications faces perplexingly-rapid change. More research is needed in this important area to track the change as it occurs — both for diversifying religious groups and for media seeking to understand or communicate about them. Regardless, based on established trends in American religious history, it can be expected those aspects of religious communication which will be the most enduring will be those aimed at persons rather than institutions, and at transcendent meaning rather than the passing whims of media gatekeepers — regardless of the medium or technology used to craft the message.

Notes

1. This study's foundations lie in theories of culture since the 1920s, dominant as a paradigm within anthropology, following the teachings of Franz Boas and Claude Levi-Strauss and symbolic

or interpretative anthropologists. These are noted by George Stocking (1976) in "Ideas and Institutions in American Anthropology: Toward a History of the Interwar Years," in *Selected Papers from the "American Anthropologist" 1921-45*, ed. G. Stocking (Washington, D.C.: American Anthropological Association). It is a perspective that has come under criticism by post-Geertzian anthropologists and poststructuralist cultural critics. (cf. Geertz, C. (1973)*The Interpretation of Cultures*, New York: Basic Books; and Turner, V. (1967) *The Forest of Symbols*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press).

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Hollywood's God: The Problem of Divine Providence

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Hollywood's God: The Problem of Divine Providence

Contemporary secular journalism usually avoids expressly accepting the reality of the unseen, but the various forms of popular culture can operate outside the bounds of the empirical. Motion pictures are an especially engaging means of mass communication that can present virtually anything the mind can conceive. Films can depict what the Deity does and can reflect mortal thought about Divine Providence, but may be inclined to emphasize big-screen production values at the cost of conveying inner spiritual life. Technicolor scenery, special effects, celebrity actors, and spiced-up scripts may distract from deeply personal religious experience. A movie is a product involving the intricate interplay of market demands and cultural values. Critics of consumer society point to the manipulation, superficiality, and commercialization found in mass media environments[1] and film scholars have evaluated movies with religious themes,[2] but questions remain about the problems that arise when a topic as sensitive and speculative as the activity of the Creator becomes a subject for movie audiences seeking solace and relishing retribution in a troubled world. What are the underlying postulates about God's power? What forms have the perceptions taken and how have they been shaped? An abridged account of God's career in Hollywood surely cannot exhaust all the possibilities for historical interpretation, but may be able to

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[1] For summaries and analysis of such approaches, Hanno Hardt, *Interactions: Critical Studies in Communication, Media, and Journalism* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1998).

[2] See, for example, Clive Marsh and Gaye Ortiz, eds., *Explorations in Theology and Film: Movies and Meaning* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997); Bruce Babington and Peter William Evans, *Bible Epics: Sacred Narrative in the Hollywood Cinema* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993); Les Keyser and Barbara Keyser, *Hollywood and the Catholic Church: The Image of Roman Catholicism in American Movies* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1984). For descriptive treatments of selected films, see Peter Fraser, *Images of the Passion: The Sacramental Mode in Film* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1998); Margaret R. Miles, *Seeing and Believing: Religion and Values in the Movies* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996); Joel W. Martin and Conrad E. Ostwalt Jr., eds., *Screening the Sacred: Religion, Myth, and Ideology in Popular American Film* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1995); Roy Kinnard and Tim Davis, *Divine Images: A History of Jesus on the Screen* (New York: Citadel Press, 1992); Peter Malone, *Movie Christs and Antichrists* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1990); John R. May and Michael Bird, eds., *Religion in Film* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1982); Ivan Butler, *Religion in the Cinema* (New York: A. S. Barnes, 1969).

identify some of the more discernible factors at work, particularly the precautions and marketing ploys the industry has utilized in its religious storytelling.

Theology is presumably another source of influence. Constructions of Providence can rest on the decisive intervention of classic theism or on the divine persuasion described by process theists.[3] The less complicated notion of supernatural power makes God the direct cause of events. Producer Darryl F. Zanuck told his writers that the ideal religious film included the "miracle of faith where God's hand reaches out when all is lost."[4] On the contrary, process modes of thought, ones that emphasize relational conceptions of the self and God, see the Supreme Being as an influence on what occurs. The meek who will inherit the earth are not the weak, but rather those believers who are strong enough to sustain loving relationships when the world and the people in it are not perfect.[5] In her book *Why Not Try God?*, Mary Pickford, the silent film actress, said that as a child she had not wanted to love a God who allowed evil, but then as an adult came to understand that a friendly presence of beneficent strength was always available to her. "God is a twenty-four hour station," she wrote. "All you need to do is to plug in." By plugging in with truthful, good thinking, Pickford said, people "can have and use all the Love, all the Power, all the Courage, all the Energy, all the Cheerfulness, all the Activity and all the Kindliness of God."[6]

Historical analysis of Hollywood's approaches to Divine Providence can show how suppositions about God's power have evolved. Motion picture plots typically accepted a classic conception of the Deity's activity until the mass anxieties of a depression, a world

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[3] See James A. Keller, "The Power of God and Miracles in Process Theism," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 63 (Spring 1995): 105-26.

[4] Darryl Zanuck, memorandum, 20 September 1952, *The Gun and the Cross* file, Twentieth Century-Fox collection, UCLA, quoted in Frank Walsh, *Sin and Censorship: The Catholic Church and the Motion Picture Industry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 226.

[5] Bernard Loomer, "Two Conceptions of Power," *Process Studies* 6 (Spring 1976): 5-32.

[6] Mary Pickford, *Why Not Try God?*, (New York: H. C. Kinsey, 1934), 1-7, 21 (quotations). On Pickford's book and personal philosophies of positive thinking, see Eileen Whitfield, *Pickford: The Woman Who Made Hollywood* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1997), 288-89. For a book that attempts to document the religious lives of movie stars, see Alice Canfield, *God in Hollywood* (New York: Wisdom House, 1961).

war, and the dawning of the atomic age fostered a reevaluation of God's relationship with humanity. Filmmakers took up the challenge with their versions of process theology and, once liberated from the constraints of formal self-censorship in the 1960s, with an existential redesign of religion in which uncertainty is acknowledged and individuals are radically free. The speculation that God is dead or largely dormant gained ground in the cinema. By the end of the century the Supreme Being was losing the movie role of shaper of reality to human beings who were expected to make authentic, personal choices about what to believe and to do without a universal moral system.

I.

Motion pictures with religious themes can deal with momentous issues, but take the risk of antagonizing audiences. As the Hollywood studios began using public relations techniques to counteract criticism in the silent film era, they regularly consulted with representatives of religious denominations and made recommended changes, but such efforts were sometimes to no avail.[7] MGM's comedy *The Callahans and the Murphys* (1927), for instance, was withdrawn from distribution after complaints from Irish and Catholic groups. A news release from the National Catholic Welfare Conference said, "In its introduction of Catholic 'atmosphere'-the name of St. Patrick, the Crucifix, the Sign of the Cross-it is a hideous defamation of Catholic beliefs and practices."[8] The death of MGM's president, Marcus Loew, after the film opened was regarded by some critics of the movie's Irish-Catholic stereotypes as a sign from heaven.[9] The dangers of representing the divine were still evident six decades later as conservative Christians orchestrated

[7] Will H. Hays, "Supervision from Within," in *The Story of the Films*, ed. Joseph P. Kennedy (Chicago: Shaw, 1927), 49.

[8] "An Affront to Catholics," press release, National Catholic Welfare Conference News Service, 25 July 1927, *The Callahans and the Murphys* file, Production Code Administration Collection (hereafter cited as PCA Collection), Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Beverly Hills, Calif. MGM consulted with Irish Catholic organizations during the filming and made cuts recommended by the societies after release. William A. Orr to Will H. Hayes, 23 August 1927; E. J. Mannix to Col. Jason S. Joy, 25 July 1927, *The Callahans and the Murphys* file, PCA Collection.

widespread protests that significantly limited the distribution of Martin Scorsese's *The Last Temptation of Christ* (1988). Universal hired a born-again marketing expert to be a liaison with religious groups and release was supported by the other major studios as a matter of free expression, but fundamentalists denounced the film for having a self-doubting Jesus who imagines having a domestic life with Mary Magdalene.[10] Such plot devices, ones that show something potentially offensive and contrive to say it is not actually happening in the story, often have been used to avoid accusations of contempt for God and the clergy.

Films can also maintain a somewhat safe distance between the sacred and the profane simply by offering, like other forms of visual art, a mediated and more or less ecumenical creation to the viewer. Although passion plays on stage had significant press, official, and church opposition in the late nineteenth-century United States, the same subject, Christ's life, was the topic of half a dozen imported or domestic films in 1897 and 1898. The flickering images may have seemed more akin to religious art than to what actors did in a theater. In any case, American churches embraced the infant medium at the turn of the century as a means of inspiration and of competition with public amusements. One reason that entrepreneurs saw opportunities was that showing the films on Sundays could be an exception to blue laws. Hollywood mogul Adolph Zukor recalled doing "land office business" with Pathé's *The Life and Passion of Jesus Christ* (1908). A priest in Newark liked the film, but threatened to call in city authorities because he thought it was sacrilegious to show the movie in a theater rather than a church. The priest decided not to act when Zukor explained that the film was saving him from bankruptcy. At least seventy movies with Bible themes were made in the United States and Europe before the outbreak of World War I. Not straying far from scripture or from reverent fiction, these early religious motion pictures dramatized divine judgments and miracles in straightforward fashion, often with great care as the industry matured. One of the first American movies,

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[9] Francis R. Walsh, "'*The Callahans and the Murphys*' (MGM, 1927): A Case Study of Irish-American and Catholic Church Censorship," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 10 (1990): 39.

The Passion Play (1898), was shot on a New York City rooftop, but a later one, *From the Manger to the Cross* (1912), was filmed at what were thought to be exact locations in Egypt and Palestine. Both films were highly profitable.[11]

During and after the war, contemporary social and political concerns became intertwined with the biblical in cinema. D. W. Griffith's monumental, melodramatic *Intolerance: Love's Struggle Throughout the Ages* (1916) brings together stories of God's love working against injustice in ancient Babylon, Christ's Judea, sixteenth-century France, and the current United States. Although he did not have solid sectarian convictions, Griffith did have strong feelings about human misery, artistic freedom, and the importance of motion pictures as a medium for moral instruction. The movie begins with a title card that reacts to the censorship controversies created by Griffith's earlier epic *Birth of a Nation* (1915), a racist film that sympathized with white Southerners during the Civil War and Reconstruction. The introductory statement in *Intolerance* denies any "wish to offend with improprieties or obscenities," but demands "the same liberty that is conceded to the art of the written word-that art to which we owe the Bible and the works of Shakespeare." Jesus (Howard Gaye) is shown as a forgiving friend to sinners and as an opponent of Pharisees who denounce simple pleasures. The American story in *Intolerance* portrays harsh labor conditions, the follies of self-righteous reformers, and the cruelties of criminal justice. The prayers of a poor, devout Catholic girl (Mae Marsh) are answered as she finds a husband (Robert Harron) and as he is saved from hanging after being wrongly convicted of murder. Griffith hired clergy members for advice and a real-life priest (A. W. McClure) for administering sacraments before the gallows scenes, scenes that are placed in juxtaposition to Christ's Crucifixion. Just as *Birth of a Nation* ends with Jesus pacifying conflict, *Intolerance* has an epilogue with angels heralding an end to prisons and war.

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[10] Charles Lyons, "The Paradox of Protest: American Film, 1980-1992," in *Movie Censorship and American Culture*, ed. Francis G. Couvares (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996), 300-309.
[11] Richard H. Campbell and Michael R. Pitts, *The Bible on Film: A Checklist, 1897-1980* (Metuchen, N. J.: Scarecrow Press, 1981), 1-9, 73-90; Charles Musser, "Passions and the Passion Play: Theater, Film,

Griffith's Christ, a prototypical Hollywood Savior, does not redeem humanity from sin so much as be what a title calls "the greatest enemy of intolerance."[12]

Respect for religion was a tenet of the film industry's self-regulatory codes in effect from the 1920s to the 1960s. The "Thirteen Points" adopted by National Association of the Motion Picture Industry in 1921 condemned movies giving offense to religion and religious leaders. In 1927 the Motion Pictures Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA) endorsed a more specific list of "Don'ts and Be Carefuls" that prohibited the profane use of God's name and ridicule of the clergy. The guidelines relied almost entirely on the willingness of studios to cooperate, but at least provided some clues about how to avoid cuts demanded by local and foreign censors.[13] One of the safeguards that developed in practice was indicating that less-than-admirable clergy characters had never been ordained. The clownish preacher played by Charlie Chaplin in *The Pilgrim* (1923) is an escaped convict who assumes the identity of a parson whose arrival in Devil's Gulch, Texas, has been delayed. The criminal clergyman (Paul Robeson) in *Body and Soul* (1925) is not only an escaped prisoner and imposter, but also commits many of his misdeeds in what turns out to be a dream.[14] In other cases, such as *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1923) and *West of the Water Tower* (1924), novels with dissolute clergy characters were made less objectionable. Universal made cuts in the hunchback movie that were recommended by Catholic consultants. Carl Laemmle, a producer of the film, told reviewers in advance that he was taking necessary liberties with an offensive novel and that the changes made no

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and Religion in America, 1880-1900," in *Movie Censorship and American Culture*, 43-72; Adolph Zukor, "Origin and Growth of the Industry," in *The Story of the Films*, 59.

[12] Richard Schickel, *D. W. Griffith: An American Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984), 33, 271-72, 281-331; Scott Simmon, *The Films of D. W. Griffith*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 150-57; Keyser and Keyser, *Hollywood and the Catholic Church*, 4-18. For analysis of the film, see William M. Drew, *D. W. Griffith's* Intolerance*: Its Genesis and Its Vision* (Jefferson, N. C.: McFarland, 1986).

[13] Walsh, *Sin and Censorship*, 24-25, 47-49; Leonard J. Leff and Jerold L. Simmons, *The Dame in the Kimono: Hollywood, Censorship, and the Production Code from the 1920s to the 1960s* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1990), 3-10; Ruth Inglis, *Freedom of the Movies: A Report on Self-Regulation from the Commission on Freedom of the Press* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1947), 83-116.

difference as long as he made a great motion picture. "It is better to present a classic in a palatable form than in an undigestible mass!" he insisted.[15]

The care exercised by the studios was not enough to eliminate fears that films were becoming a threat to public morality. Hollywood's attempts to sanitize its products in the increasingly audacious 1920s proved ineffectual. Under pressure from religious groups, reformers, lawmakers, and bankers, Will Hays, head of the MPPDA, created the Production Code Administration (PCA) in 1934 to enforce the Motion Picture Production Code of 1930.[16] The 1930 code stressed the "*moral importance*" of entertainment and established standards that prohibited sympathy for wrongdoing or contempt for religion. "Law, natural or divine, must not be belittled, ridiculed, nor must a sentiment be created against it," the code declared.[17] The PCA reviewed scripts before production and had to approve movies before they were released. Films were expected to have "compensating moral values" when evils were portrayed.[18]

Hollywood already had experience in making plainly didactic stories about the costs of sin. Cecil B. DeMille's classic *The Ten Commandments* (1923), for instance, used surprisingly advanced special effects to show the sea parting for Moses (Theodore Roberts) and then drowning the pharaoh (Charles de Roche) who had enslaved the people of Israel. The dramatizing of iniquity, of course, did provide an opportunity for provocative scenes. The film sensationalizes the Bible by turning Miriam (Estelle Taylor), the singing and

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[14] For the effects of censorship on *Body and Soul*, see Charlene Regester, "Black Films, White Censors: Oscar Micheaux Confronts Censorship in New York, Virginia, and Chicago," in *Movie Censorship and American Culture*, 180-81.

[15] Raymond Moley, *The Hays Office* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1945), 57-58, 137; Walsh, *Sin and Censorship*, 33-34; Carl Laemmle to Quinn Martin, 13 January 1923, in *Will Hays Papers*, ed. Douglas Gomery (Frederick, Md.: University Publications of America, 1986), microfilm, pt. 1, reel 8, frames 647-48.

[16] Francis G. Couvares, "Hollywood, Main Street, and the Church: Trying to Censor the Movies before the Production Code," in *Movie Censorship and American Culture*, 129-58; Stephen Vaughn, "Morality and Entertainment: The Origins of the Motion Picture Production Code," *Journal of American History* 77 (June 1990): 39-65; Gregory D. Black, "Hollywood Censored: The Production Code Administration and the Hollywood Film Industry, 1930-1940," *Film History* 3 (1989): 167-89.

[17] The Motion Picture Production Code of 1930, Appendix I, in Olga J. Martin, *Hollywood's Movie Commandments: A Handbook for Motion Picture Writers and Reviewers* (New York: H. W. Wilson, 1937), 271 (first quotation, italics in original), 275 (second quotation).

dancing sister of Moses, into a drunken, idolatrous woman who is groped at a wild orgy. She is swiftly punished with leprosy and lightning strikes the golden calf the revelers are worshipping. In the second part of the movie, the lesson is updated with the story of a modern building contractor, Dan (Rod La Rocque), who rejects religion, worships money, and makes a point of breaking the commandments. His reverent mother (Edythe Chapman) is killed when a church he built collapses because of shoddy construction. The moral of the story then appears on the screen for the silent film's audience: "Dan begins to realize, that if you break the Ten Commandments-they will break you." Dan goes to his mistress (Nita Naldi) for help, but he discovers that she has leprosy. He shoots her and flees in a boat that crashes into a rock. A quote from the Gospel of Matthew is shown to sum up the film's sermon: "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the world, and lose his own soul?" Dan's wife (Leatrice Joy), who has contracted leprosy from him, is miraculously cured after his Christ-figure brother (Richard Dix), a carpenter, reads the Bible story of Jesus curing a leper.

The Ten Commandments, like *the Sign of the Cross* (1932) and the other religious films DeMille directed, managed to serve up vicarious, sinful pleasure under the protective lid of pious condemnation. Yet, he may have been as sincere a moralizer as Griffith, a director he regarded as a "great genius" who lacked business sense and sound dramatic construction. DeMille knew how to shape and sell a movie, but he also contemplated the questions of theodicy. A man who thought that Providence affected his own life, DeMille observed that Dan's fate in *The Ten Commandments* was a matter of self-destruction. "Retribution comes upon him not as a vengeful visitation of an arbitrary God: rather it grows inevitably out of his own acts," the director said, "for the moral law is as much a part of the structure of the universe as the law of gravity." DeMille nevertheless had to take pains to avoid offending audiences and to appease potential critics. He hired hundreds of orthodox Jews, ostensibly as authentic-looking extras, for *The Ten Commandments*, but

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[18] Joseph I. Breen to Will H. Hayes, 1 March 1936, quoted in Moley, *Hays Office*, 101.

had to make amends when the commissary served ham on their first day of location filming.[19] With the enthusiastic help of the Hays Office, DeMille courted journalists and sought advice from clergy of various denominations.[20]

One of the consultants for DeMille's Christ movie *The King of Kings* (1927) was Father Daniel Lord, the Jesuit priest who later wrote Hollywood's 1930 Production Code in an effort, Lord said, to overcome the industry's immoral pandering and "to tie the Ten Commandments in with the newest and most widespread form of entertainment." Lord celebrated mass on location, a service that DeMille's autobiography described as "like a continued benediction on our work, which began on the first day of shooting with a short service of prayer participated in by representatives of the Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, Buddhist, and Moslem faiths." To preserve an aura of reverence, the actor who played Jesus (H. B. Warner) was kept away from the rest of the cast and normally allowed to speak only to DeMille when in costume. The film began with a statement expressing a hope that the portrayal would "play a reverent part in the spirit" of Christ's command that his message be taken around the world. Jesus had been made ecumenical enough for dozens of earlier films and could be a subject for additional, non-theatrical religious and educational markets of Christians, but the film met with criticism from Jewish groups and was banned in some cities. Of particular concern was the implication that Jews were responsible for the Crucifixion, an issue that had forced Griffith to re-shoot scenes in *Intolerance*. A number of changes were made in *The King of Kings* after negotiations with B'nai B'rith. In Britain, where censors banned material representations of Christ, a special license had to be given for the London screening. Lord later successfully discouraged DeMille from making a *Queen of Queens* film about Mary, the mother of Jesus.[21]

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[19] Cecil B. DeMille, *The Autobiography of Cecil B. DeMille*, ed. Donald Hayne (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1959), 124 (first quotation), 125-26, 242, 251 (second quotation), 252.
[20] See, for example, Will Hays to Arthur B. Krock, 24 January 1923, and Will Hays to Rev. William C. Covert, 25 January 1923, in *Hays Papers*, pt. 1, reel 8, frames 714, 731.
[21] Daniel A. Lord, *Played By Ear* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1956), 277-86, 298 (quotation); DeMille, *Autobiography*, 279 (quotation), 282; Richard Maltby, "*The King of Kings* and the Czar of All

In his autobiography, DeMille said that he heard predictions of disaster every time he made a biblical movie because the devout would find it irreverent and the indifferent would dislike a film in which "sanctimonious characters would walk around in long robes." The need to appeal to a broad audience may have been a factor in the choice of Bruce Barton, a prominent advertising executive, as an additional consultant for *The King of Kings*. Barton was the author of *The Man Nobody Knows*, a best-seller that portrayed Jesus as physically strong and as a savvy practitioner of the same techniques used in successful businesses. As a child, Barton disliked the Sunday school images of a sad, pale Jesus and of a God who "was always picking on people for having a good time, and sending little boys to hell." He later decided that Christ needed a new image, one of a man who could live outdoors, be a popular dinner guest, and forge "an organization that conquered the world." During the Harding and Coolidge administrations many Protestant leaders celebrated business and preached that religion pays off in worldly success, but DeMille did not choose to make an explicit connection between the biblical and the contemporary as he had done in *The Ten Commandments*.[22] *The King of Kings* did have elaborate costumes and sets as well as studies in female anatomy, particularly that of Mary Magdalene (Jacqueline Logan). The movie was also brimming with maudlin miracles. The first appearance of Jesus is through the healing eyes of a blind child. Christ resembles a magician as he fixes a girl's doll and raises the dead. However, the film goes to great lengths to make the Savior a dignified, suffering, and caring man who would hug his mother (Dorothy Cumming), pick up a stray lamb, and preach the need to love and not judge one another.

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the Rushes: The Propriety of the Christ Story," *Screen* 31 (Summer 1990): 188-213; Babington and Evans, *Bible Epics*, 101; John Trevelyan, *What the Censor Saw* (London: Michael Joseph, 1973), 31, 32, 40.

[22] DeMille, *Autobiography*, 275; Bruce Barton, *The Man and the Book Nobody Knows* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1926), ix (first quotation), xii (second quotation). The title of Barton's 1926 book reflects the publication of *The Man Nobody Knows* (1924) and *The Book Nobody Knows* (1926) in one volume. For discussions of the compatibility of business and religion in the 1920s, see Rolf Lundén, *Business and Religion in the American 1920s* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988); Robert Moats Miller, *American Protestantism and Social Issues, 1919-1939* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1958), 17-47.

DeMille wrote in his 1959 memoirs that *The King of Kings*, which he said had probably told the story of Jesus to more people around the world than any single work except the Bible, rejected "the effeminate, sanctimonious, machine-made Christs." In what may have been a reaction to those who condemned movies as immoral, the director said Jesus was a hardy man with compassion for sinners and contempt for hypocrites. A considerable amount of the pressure for more edifying films came from another consultant for *The King of Kings*, Reverend George Reid Andrews, the head of several groups that promoted religious values in entertainment. DeMille's autobiography mentions that the other consultants, Lord and Barton, became lifelong friends, a category from which Andrews is noticeably absent. Before going to work on the script as a paid consultant, Andrews had tried to get ten percent of the gross receipts of the film given to his Church and Drama Association and veto power over the script given to the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America (FCCCA), an organization of liberal Protestant denominations that had made him chairman of its Religious and Educational Committee. Relations between producers and their Protestant critics deteriorated over such issues and in 1931 the FCCCA published a report attacking the industry's public relations methods. Hollywood showed little interest in costly biblical spectaculars during the Depression and World War II.[23]

Divine Providence, however, did not disappear from movie screens. Wartime films frequently linked American objectives to God's will. The association was made unmistakable with titles such as *For God and Country* (1943), *Wing and a Prayer* (1944), and *God is My Co-Pilot* (1945). The government's Office of War Information (OWI) helped to shape Hollywood films through its guidelines and script reviews. The OWI wanted the industry to emphasize that the United States was fighting a people's war, but sometimes leaned heavily on studios to portray the struggle as God's war. The OWI upset

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[23] DeMille, *Autobiography*, 276 (quotation), 279, 281-82; Maltby, "*The King of Kings*," 204-13; *The Public Relations of the Motion Picture Industry: A Report by the Department of Research and Education,*

Paramount executives by asking for more divine approval in a chaplain's speech in *So Proudly We Hail* (1943), a hit film about army nurses (Claudette Colbert, Paulette Goddard, and Veronica Lake) facing perils in the Philippines. The studio resisted making the movie too preachy, but the OWI was satisfied with the result that had repeated references to God and spoke of the "miracle" of the women's safe return.[24] In *Casablanca* (1942), the departing words of Ilsa (Ingrid Bergman) for Rick (Humphrey Bogart) at the Paris train station and again at the Casablanca airport are "God bless you." In *This is the Army* (1943) boxer Joe Louis is asked if he is nervous about appearing in a morale-boosting show. "I quit worrying the day I got into uniform," he replies. "All I know is I'm in Uncle Sam's army and we're on God's side." The movie, which had Ronald Reagan in a central role, included singer Kate Smith's famed rendition of "God Bless America."[25] Decades later, Smith was singing the song at hockey games to give luck to the Philadelphia Flyers and the Deity was still a presence in World War II films. In *Memphis Belle* (1990), an officer briefs American bomber crews on a particularly dangerous mission over Germany. "Let's do this job the best we can," he says. "Leave the rest in the hands of God."

In contrast to the providential well-being of the United States, Axis countries are diagnosed as having a reliance on false gods. As American troops enter a bombed-out Italian village in the opening scenes of *A Bell for Adano* (1945), for instance, they pass in front of a huge portrait of Mussolini's contorted face on a crumbling wall. The local priest (Hugo Haas) tells his church members about the obedience God expects from them and from the occupiers. The army and navy work together to replace a bell that regulated town life for centuries before being melted down for fascist weapons. *Prelude to War* (1942),

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Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America (New York: Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America, 1931).

[24] Clayton R. Koppes and Gregory D. Black, *Hollywood Goes to War: How Politics, Profits, and Propaganda Shaped World War II Movies* (New York: Free Press, 1987; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), vii-viii, 67, 98-104.

[25] On Ronald Reagan's religious views and his films during World War II, see Stephen Vaughn, *Ronald Reagan In Hollywood: Movies and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 8-16, 104-18.

the first of the U.S. military's *Why We Fight Series*, told millions of soldiers that Nazis attacked religious institutions and that the Japanese fanatically worshipped their emperor. "Yes," the narrator says, "take children from the faith of their fathers and teach them the state is the only church and the head of the state is the voice of God." The United States, on the other hand, is presented as a land blessed with religious freedom. The War Department's *Know Your Enemy: Japan* (1945) said the god-emperor system created a sense of divine mission that was used to justify that country's aggression. "If you are Japanese," the narrator says, "you believe you have been commanded by heaven to conquer all other races and peoples and put them under a Japanese rule." Occupation officials ordered the emperor to deny his divinity and imposed media censorship that stopped references to him as a god and that banned attacks on religion.[26]

II.

Process theology was opening cracks in the edifice of Hollywood's classical theism by the 1930s. *The Green Pastures* (1936), a film with an all-black cast, has a series of Bible stories that recount God's disappointments with humanity beginning with Adam and Eve. "You know you don't make no mistakes, Lord," says Gabriel (Oscar Polk) before the Flood. "So they tell me," says De Lawd (Rex Ingram), "but I find I can be displeased, though." After more frustrations and punishments, De Lawd mutters, "Even being God ain't no bed of roses." By the end of the movie De Lawd has learned through his experiences and the Crucifixion that the Deity can suffer and that it is better to be a God of mercy than of wrath. The film may have dodged criticism by being set up as tales told to young Sunday school children and by having enough humor and charming touches to make it clear that it was not to be taken too seriously. A patronizing statement at the beginning of the movie says that God appears in many forms to believers. "Thousands of Negroes in

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[26] Kyoko Hirano, "*The Japanese Tragedy*: Film Censorship and the American Occupation," in *Resisting Images: Essays on Cinema and History*, ed. Robert Sklar and Charles Musser (Philadelphia: Temple

the Deep South visualize God and Heaven in terms of people and things they know in their everyday life," the disclaimer explains. "The Green Pastures is an attempt to portray that humble, reverent conception." The reformed Lord in *The Green Pastures* realizes that maintaining relationships with people is more meaningful than enforcing rules. The Supreme Being of process theology is more interested in understanding and inspiring than in controlling. Human difficulties are the result of human choices.

The working of God's love in people's hearts can be found as early as *Civilization* (1916), one of the antiwar movies made before the United States entered World War I. The film has Christ show the consequences of battle to a bellicose despot who is moved enough to bring his soldiers home. Such outcomes were especially evident in movies of the 1930s and 1940s. In *Gabriel Over the White House* (1933), an unprincipled, ineffectual president is inspired by an unseen archangel (a presence indicated by a breeze on curtains) to begin solving the nation's Depression-era problems with a benevolent dictatorship. His deeds are accompanied by "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" which represents the Lord acting militantly in the world. The film was a project of press lord William Randolph Hearst, the apparent model for *Citizen Kane* eight years later, and was watched several times by President Franklin D. Roosevelt. Columnist Walter Lippmann described the movie president as "the savior of mankind through the Gospel of Mr. Hearst."[27] God's love was also at work in lighter fare. The all-black romp *Cabin in the Sky* (1943) has angels and devils competing for the soul of an habitual gambler (Eddie "Rochester" Anderson) in what turns out to be a dream. When the man wakes up, the prayers of his long-suffering wife (Ethel Waters) are answered with his decision to give up betting. Trying to earn his wings, a novice guardian angel in Frank Capra's Christmas classic *It's A Wonderful Life* (1946) shows a decent person about to commit suicide

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University Press, 1990), 200-224. For background, see John W. Dower, *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986).

[27] Robert L. McConnell, "The Genesis and Ideology of *Gabriel over the White House*," *Cinema Journal* (Spring 1976): 7-26; Walter Lippmann, "Politics Over Hollywood," *New York Herald Tribune*, 4 April 1933, late city edition.

(James Stewart) that his seemingly miserable life had saved his town from a scheming man of wealth. The protagonist returns to the joys of family life.

The Hays Office gave attention to both the impact and the minutest details of motion pictures with religious content. Among the suggestions for *Gabriel Over the White House* was an ending that would have "a hopeful note of confidence and trust in God." Yet, a presumptuous trust in divine reward for an individual was another matter. The PCA wanted a line about being in heaven changed from "*surely* in that other world" to "*God willing*" in *The Garden of Allah* (1936), a film with the touchy topic of a Trappist monk (Charles Boyer) struggling against his romantic interest in a woman (Marlene Dietrich). The PCA told the makers of *It's A Wonderful Life* , "Please change the expression 'Thank God' since in the context it does not seem to be used quite reverently." A number of casual references to hell, such as "hell of a time," were marked for removal from the *Cabin in the Sky* script and the studio was warned that its predecessor in jovial depictions of African-American religion, *The Green Pastures*, had experienced trouble abroad. Racial stereotypes, however, did not present much of a problem to the industry. "What lesson there is to be found in 'Cabin in the Sky,'" the *New Yorker* said derisively, "is that if colored folks will lay off the crapshooting and stick to their singing and praying like the carefree chuckleheads they essentially are, they will get along all right."[28] The industry's self-censorship thus allowed movies to explore the entertainment possibilities of religion, but insisted that language be used very carefully.

The PCA expected movie characters in religious life to be treated with respect and encouraged films that were more heartwarming than mind-expanding. The clergy could be allowed some struggles in their personal commitments, but were likely to handle difficulties of all sorts almost effortlessly, as if with divine blessing. The charming Father Chuck

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[28] Memorandum, 2 March 1933, *Gabriel Over the White House* file, PCA Collection; Joseph I. Breen to David O. Selznick, 9 June 1936, *The Garden of Allah* file, PCA Collection; Joseph I. Breen to William Gordon, 29 March 1946, *It's A Wonderful Life* file, PCA Collection; Joseph I. Breen to L. B. Mayer, 29 June 1942, *Cabin in the Sky* file, PCA Collection; David Lardner, "The Current Cinema," *New Yorker*, 29 May 1943.

O'Malley (Bing Crosby) of *Going My Way* (1944), a film that won seven Academy Awards including best picture, deals effectively with several adult dilemmas while turning delinquents into choir boys. O'Malley is supposed to be a regular guy who had a girlfriend before becoming a priest and who plays golf, but he has a preternatural ability to make things turn out well. A baseball team thinks he brings them luck and an unseen, kindly bishop (who may represent God) keeps using him as a problem solver. O'Malley's main task in the film is helping the crusty, old Father Fitzgibbon (Barry Fitzgerald) who has built a church in a low-income neighborhood of New York and who has fallen behind on the payments. In what could be seen as a judgment on his sour, unforgiving disposition, the church burns down. The easy-going O'Malley not only raises money with his musical talents, but also reunites Fitzgibbon with his aged Irish mother in the end as he disappears into the night without taking the opportunity to receive any thanks. The PCA was initially concerned that the film might be an affront to priestly dignity and urged the use of a Catholic consultant, but, in issuing a certificate of approval, noted that the characterizations were "sympathetic" and that religious ceremonies were handled "properly."[29] The film leaves the impression that God works in mysterious ways through good people.

Women in religious orders also use special musical gifts in *The Sound of Music* (1965), winner of five Academy Awards including best picture, and *The Singing Nun* (1966). In these and other films such as *Call of the Flesh* (1930), *Heaven Knows, Mr. Allison* (1957), *The Nun's Story* (1959), and *Change of Habit* (1969), women ponder the meaning of their religious vocations. Frequently they realize that there are alternative ways to serve God's will and decide to follow feelings that take them outside the convent.[30] People who embrace the world and each other, it seems, can experience something of the divine. A mother superior (Lilia Skala) in the *Lilies of the Field* (1963) believes that the transient laborer (Sidney Poitier, who won an Academy Award for best actor in the role)

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[29] Joseph I. Breen to Luigi Luraschi, 12 August 1943; Certificate of Approval, 8 February 1944, *Going My Way* file, PCA Collection.

has been sent by God to build a chapel for her group of nuns. They are immigrants whose difficulties with practical matters and the English language provide comic relief. The women and the man go through an amusing bonding process despite their differences. Ultimately the community joins in to complete the project and the laborer, like savior cowboys who rescue feckless frontier towns, is not interested in settling down or being thanked. He gets into his station wagon and rides off into the Arizona desert. Does God provide for the devout as for the lilies of the field or are people who need people the luckiest people in the world? The film does not offer a clear answer, but those who trust in God and in good people do seem blessed.

A second, more star-studded era of Bible epics began in 1949 with DeMille's *Samson and Delilah*. The director drummed up enthusiasm for his project by describing *Samson and Delilah* to his bosses and writers as a hot love story with a brawny man and ravishing woman. DeMille had other things in mind as well. An anti-communist prologue presents the film as one episode of the "divine spark" of "the unquenchable will for freedom" changing history. The struggles of Samson (Victor Mature) against his Philistine oppressors show that right can produce might, might Samson gets when he prays. "Anyone can share it," Samson explains to Delilah (Hedy Lamarr). "It's a gift that makes men greater than themselves." Samson's strength is superhuman, but the man himself has very human shortcomings that include a reckless sex drive. Once Samson is blinded by his enemies he can see how foolish he has been and pulls down their temple in a dying act. In his later years, DeMille's views on divine power evidently became more like those of one of his stars, Mary Pickford. His understanding of Providence became less the punishment of evil and more the possibility of personal transformation. Instead of a morality play or magic show, an inner drama occurs as people make their choices and perhaps reach for their better natures. "As I conceive of God," DeMille's autobiography says as he explains his lack of regular church attendance, "He is that Mind behind the universe we see, of

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[30] For frank accounts of PCA treatment of *Heaven Knows, Mr. Allison*, *The Nun's Story*, and other films,

which our minds are like small reflecting sparks struck off; and that Mind is always there, ready for us to touch and draw upon and reflect in our own minds more and more."[31]

DeMille introduced his second filming of *The Ten Commandments* (1956), the movie with the fifth highest inflation-adjusted domestic receipts by the end of the century,[32] with a prologue comparing the pharaoh to modern dictators. "Are men the property of the state or are they free souls under God?" he asks. "This same battle continues throughout the world today." The fault does not rest with the Creator. "God made men," Joshua (John Derek) explains in the movie. "Men made slaves." Moses (Charlton Heston) witnesses divine power in the form of Oscar-winning special effects, but the most important activity is occurring inside the man as he turns to God and begins a new life. DeMille considered a number of options for the voice of the Deity, including a chorus of different races and creeds. Finally he decided to use the voice of a man whose name would not be revealed "out of reverence." A spiritual but prudent man, DeMille consulted with scholars and avoided offending religious groups. He suffered a heart attack while on location in Egypt, but thought "that if my motives in making the film were what I thought they were, I would be given the strength to finish it." DeMille did complete *The Ten Commandments*, his last movie, and then said in his autobiography that he had lived long enough to have learned about the ways of God and that the Lord had been very good to him. He also defended himself against criticism of the sex and violence in his religious films, saying that the people in the Bible should not be seen-and would not be watched-through the stained glass of tradition. "Clothing them in what we think is reverence," he wrote, "we have too often stripped the men and women of the Bible of their

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see Jack Vizzard, *See No Evil: Life Inside a Hollywood Censor* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1970).

[31] DeMille, *Autobiography*, 398-99, 433 (quotation); Phil A. Koury, *Yes, Mr. DeMille* (New York: Putnam, 1959), 206, 214.

[32] Stuart Elliott, "The Hype Is With Us," *New York Times*, 14 May 1999, national edition.

humanity; and I believe that the same process strips them of much of their religious value, too."[33]

The King of Kings (1961) has an appealing, antihero Christ (Jeffrey Hunter) who displays passive decency in a cruel world. Made by Nicholas Ray, who directed James Dean in *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955), *The King of Kings* presents a movie idol Jesus who is condemned because he is a nonconformist. When asked what Christ's crime is, Pilate (Hurd Hatfield) says, "He is different and refuses to behave like the others." Masculine beauty and vulnerability make the Savior seem as much human as divine. The movie plays down miracles and the Resurrection while emphasizing the serene "lilies of the field" logic of the Sermon on the Mount, the part the first preview audience liked the most. In reviewing the proposed script, Geoffrey M. Shurlock, head of the PCA, had expressed fears that the film would be "considered a departure from the classic Christian concept of Christ as Divine." He predicted severe repercussions from those "who share in the continuity of Western Civilization." The preview audience's reaction to Hunter's performance, however, was almost unanimously favorable. MGM sent the preview results to the PCA with a request that they be read before the finished film was reviewed for compliance with the industry code. A PCA certificate of approval was granted to *The King of Kings*, a movie in which Jesus relies more on personal charisma than on sovereign power.[34]

Classic, unambiguous approaches to divine intervention became difficult to accept in light of the catastrophic events of the twentieth century. The Creator, it seemed, should not be held responsible for oppression, genocide, and a host of other ancient or modern ills. *The Next Voice You Hear* (1950), a movie made in the depths of the Cold War with

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[33] DeMille, *Autobiography*, 399 (third quotation), 412-13, 429 (second quotation), 431-32 (first quotation). Movie industry censors were concerned, as usual, about the amount of sex in the film. Joseph I. Breen to Luigi Laraschi, 26 August 1954, *The Ten Commandments* file, PCA Collection. For a review arguing that the "DeMille God is imprisoned in the DeMille style" of movie spectacular, see Tom F. Driver, "Hollywood in the Wilderness," *Christian Century*, 28 November 1956.

Nancy Davis (later First Lady Nancy Reagan), has God making a series of worldwide radio broadcasts encouraging peace, love, faith, and freedom. Doubters want miracles as proof of the voice's identity, but the Supreme Being says that the Earth itself is a supernatural blessing and that people can make their own miracles through human understanding. In other words, the Deity offers the opportunity to do good, but, accordingly, people have to be capable of wrongdoing. PCA head Joseph Breen gave assurance of approval if the movie was filmed with good intent and in good taste, but British authorities warned that their well-paying market would be off-limits to a movie that placed God in the settings of everyday life. The politically liberal producer, Dore Schary, wondered about "the reaction by religious groups to our lack of formality in speaking about God." The movie avoided offending anyone with the sound of God by having important plot developments occur during the broadcasts. The divine voice in *The Next Voice You Hear* is never heard. The heartening messages are repeated later by listeners. Schary believed that "in the present disturbed state of the world a lot of people needed the assurance and comfort that this story could bring."[35]

The *Star Wars* and Indiana Jones movies made in the aftermath of the Vietnam debacle were a lucrative balm for the bruised national ego. Americans could appreciate fantasies that blessed their cinematic avatars and exalted the human spirit over inhuman inventions. However, to the generation that had wars in Southeast Asia, Watergate, energy crises, and international terrorism to contemplate, a potent Providence could seem more like a mystical force of long ago and far away. The true-blue heroes discover ancient, hallowed powers (the Force in the *Star Wars* films and biblical furies in two of the Indiana Jones movies) and rely on their moral strength to triumph over fiendish adversaries. Yet, the

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[34] First Preview, Scottsdale, Arizona, April 21, 1961; Geoffrey M. Shurlock to Robert M. Vogel, 14 June 1960; Robert M. W. Vogel to Geoffrey Shurlock, 26 April 1961; Certificate of Approval, 14 June 1961, *King of Kings* file, PCA Collection.

[35] Dore Schary, *Case History of a Movie* (New York: Random House, 1950), 15 (second quotation), 19-20, 32-34 (first quotation). Breen wanted the film to be "free from any suggestion of irreverence or blasphemy" and urged the studio to obtain advice from the clergy. Joseph I. Breen to L. B. Mayer, 9 February 1950, *The Next Voice You Hear* file, PCA Collection.

worthy seem to find something archaic and transitory in fighting for the good. In the end, comrades and loved ones come together in a more sublime achievement. The *Star Wars* victors are joined in brotherhood and Jones is reconciled with a former girlfriend and with his father. Trusting, caring, sharing relationships are experienced as the essence of spirituality in a complex world of mass killing and oppressive technology. A more cynical view would see entertainment juggernauts of movies, merchandise rights, and service-industry sponsorships making billions of dollars repackaging religion as a series of feel-good adventures.[36]

The two series have the sacred and the sinister do battle in public recreation reminiscent of the comic books and movie serials of the World War II era. A formula for enormous success was found in the skillful combination of the satisfying righteousness of a religious motion picture with the pulse-quickening thrills of an action hero film. The phenomenally popular Indiana Jones series of the 1980s showed how movie mayhem could be the result of supernatural powers in addition to the usual fists and firearms. In *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981), the wisecracking hero (Harrison Ford) competes with Nazis to locate the Ark of the Covenant believed to contain the broken tablets of the Ten Commandments and, Jones says, "the power of God, or something." Jones learns to respect the power as it graphically obliterates the dastardly Germans. The ark ends up being safely stored away in a vast warehouse by the U.S. government. *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* (1984), the least popular in the series, merely features a primitive priest who can rip hearts out of human sacrifice victims without killing them and a boy who harms Jones with voodoo. In *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* (1989), the Third Reich is seeking the Holy Grail from the Last Supper. A prisoner (Denholm Elliott) tells his Nazi captors, "You're meddling with powers you cannot possibly comprehend." The villains suffer hideous deaths in a divine obstacle course that protects the Grail, but Jones,

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[36] On the marketing of *Star Wars* merchandise, see Bruce Orwall and John Lippman, "Return of the Franchise," and Joseph Pereira, "Values Won't Be Stellar With a Galaxy of New Toys," *Wall Street Journal*, 14 May 1999.

representing good, is able to pass through unharmed. The malefactors' plans to use divine powers are foiled again.

Perhaps the Indiana Jones movies escaped being condemned as blasphemous (and could become the basis for Disney theme-park attractions) because they have an all-American hero, a man named Indiana, being on the side of moral might. The unambiguously evil Nazis, who actually took the occult seriously when they were in power, make the ideal opponent. They represent an un-Judeo-Christian rejection of the importance of human lives, an un-American reliance on dictatorship, and the supposed supremacy of a nation other than the United States. Steven Spielberg, director of the Indiana Jones movies, did other work with Holocaust themes and with messages about tolerance. A 1999 *New York Times Magazine* cover story titled "Steven the Good" profiled him as the most successful filmmaker in history and described his dedication to patriotism and to good triumphing over evil. A "time-permitting" practitioner of Judaism, the director of *Saving Private Ryan* (1998), *Amistad* (1997), *Schindler's List* (1993), *E. T. the Extra-Terrestrial* (1982), and *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977) said he was proud of making moral films that could not lead anyone astray. Most of his large philanthropic gifts, he noted, were anonymous because a rabbi told him those with his name attached would go unrecognized by God. Explaining his interest in collecting Norman Rockwell art, Spielberg said, "Rockwell spoke volumes about a certain kind of American morality." Asked to characterize his own moral code, he listed the Boy Scout virtues of being "trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean and reverent." Asked how he measured up, he said he did better on some than on others, but was "*very* reverent."[37]

George Lucas, the executive producer and a writer of the Indiana Jones movies, had earlier written, directed, and produced *Star Wars* (1977), a blockbuster in which virtuous space-traveling knights of long ago and far away obtain their power to do good

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[37] Stephen J. Dubner, "Steven the Good," *New York Times Magazine*, 14 February 1999.

from what the dialogue calls "the Force," a surrounding, binding energy from living things. In *Star Wars* and the sequels *The Empire Strikes Back* (1980) and *Return of the Jedi* (1983), the American-like heroes use the Force against a galactic empire's proto-Nazi villains who represent the "dark side" of the Force. When *Star Wars: Episode 1-The Phantom Menace* was released in 1999, a *Time* magazine cover story offered a lengthy Bill Moyers interview with Lucas on the meaning of the *Star Wars* films. Lucas said he wanted the movies to distill religious issues into "a more modern and easily accessible construct-that there is a greater mystery out there." He explained that using the Force meant taking a "leap of faith" and trusting feelings. The two sides of the Force, Lucas said, "are designed around compassion and greed." He pointed out that one of the main *Phantom Menace* themes is "organisms having to realize they must live for their mutual advantage." The films, Lucas said, have lessons in friendship and in choosing a destiny in "a world where evil has run amuck."[38]

III.

The motion picture industry was freer to experiment with hazardous topics like religion in the last few decades of the twentieth century. Production Code Administration enforcement was moribund by the mid-1960s as institutions were falling under attack and as the movie business was surrendering the general audience to television. Relying more on niche markets, Hollywood switched to an age-based ratings system in 1968. The Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) proffered the ratings as information for parents to use as they freely choose how to guide their children. A brochure explained that the new system "is designed to keep in close harmony with the mores, culture, the moral sense and change in our society." The brief list of standards that were supposed to be considered when making such determinations was essentially a summary of PCA guidelines. "Religion shall not be demeaned," said one of the standards. The studios, if

[38] Bill Moyers and George Lucas, "Of Myth and Men," *Time*, 26 April 1999.

they wished, could consult with the ratings board at all stages of production and make changes, but traditional barriers were breaking down. At the same time, after more than three decades of concerted activity, Catholic efforts to restrain movies through Legion of Decency ratings were fading as the church went through its post-Vatican II changes.[39] Filmmaking entered a period of abundant existential angst in which the human condition requires choices despite metaphysical uncertainty. Left in isolation and often absurdity, movie characters can act badly, but need to be true to themselves.

The second era of biblical spectaculars ended in the mid-1960s with two expensive flops depicting estrangement from the Deity. One, *The Greatest Story Ever Told* (1965), uses kitschy cameos by the likes of John Wayne and Pat Boone and has the American film debut of the Swedish actor Max von Sydow as Christ. Directed by George Stevens whose career peaked with the Christ-figure Western *Shane* (1953), the movie repeatedly presents Jesus as preaching mercy and salvation rather than judgment and revenge. He is sure of his mission, but has trouble convincing others when he asks for simple faith. Pestered for miracles, he performs them reluctantly if at all. He seems frustrated by the people he tries to instruct about trusting God and not worrying about earthly needs. "Make it your first care to love one another and to find the kingdom of God and all things shall be yours, without the asking," the risen Jesus says with a sonorous Swedish accent. Stevens counted on misused stars and distracting scenic grandeur from Western shooting locations to make the film attractive, but molded a melancholy Savior hounded by the mob that demanded his execution, a death that seemed to be a relief. Christ's countenance is markedly brighter and more cheerful after resurrection.[40]

John Huston, who tended to see institutionalized religion as an avoidance of the gritty realities he was so intent on investigating, brought his unsparing outlook to *The Bible*

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[39] Official Code Objectives, Appendix I, in Stephen Farber, *The Movie Ratings Game* (Washington, D. C.: Public Affairs Press, 1972), 17, 112 (first quotation), 115 (second quotation); Gregory D. Black, *The Catholic Crusade Against the Movies, 1940-1975* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
[40] For useful discussion of *The Greatest Story Ever Told* and *The Bible*, see Gerald E. Forshey, *American Religious and Biblical Spectaculars* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1992), 94-104, 145-60.

(1966), a box office failure largely devoted to human weakness. For nearly three hours *The Bible* dwells on human folly and on the God of Genesis as merely a creator and destroyer. None of the principal people truly welcomes hearing from God. Adam (Michael Parks) seems uneasy, Cain (Richard Harris) flees, Noah (John Huston) tries to back out of sight, Abraham (George C. Scott) is anguished, and Sarah (Ava Gardner) can only laugh in disbelief. When explaining the film Huston said that God was at first a jealous lover of humanity who was "forever asking mankind to prove our affection for Him." As the ardor cooled, he said, God became a beneficent deity and then apparently lost interest altogether. "It seems to me," Huston observed, "that the mystery of life is too great, too wide, too deep, to do more than wonder at."[41] Huston's appreciation of the natural world is evident in the scenes of the Earth being formed and of the animals being saved by Noah. Death and destruction are delivered in an almost technocratic mode. Sodom blows up in a huge mushroom cloud and the survivors of the Flood emerge from the ark like the occupants of a fallout shelter to face a lifeless, devastated world. The shrouded angels of God (all played by Peter O'Toole) destroy human lives with almost no emotion. Both *The Bible* and *The Greatest Story Ever Told* made an unflattering assessment of humanity as disaffected Americans were pondering societal problems in the Sixties. God does not seem very helpful either.

Dehumanization and alienation were themes in many movies of the Cold War era.[42] The influential work of director Stanley Kubrick has protagonists confront the loss of institutional rationality in *Paths of Glory* (1957), *Spartacus* (1960), *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (1964), and *A Clockwork Orange* (1971). In his private life, Kubrick was so sensitive to the pain of nonhuman creatures that he would not kill an insect and conducted a year-long vigil for a dying dog. He would

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[41] John Huston, *An Open Book* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1980), 329. For analysis of the religious aspects of Huston's films, see Lesley Brill, *John Huston's Filmmaking* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 8-9, 66-67, 107-8, 118, 127, 135-36.

[42] See David Manning White and Richard Averson, *The Celluloid Weapon: Social Comment in the American Film* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1972), 97-259.

throw whole loaves of bread to birds on his estate and had fresh grass brought into the house for a cat to roll in.[43] Humanity needs such guardianship in Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968). The director's most hopeful and far-reaching film, *2001* portrayed the evolving human species as developing increasingly murderous technologies, technologies that could reach the point of threatening people themselves. A cosmic power connected to mysterious black monoliths monitors the changes in civilization and ultimately shapes a rebirth at the millenium. "On the deepest psychological level," Kubrick said, "the film's plot symbolized the search for God, and it finally postulates what is little less than a scientific definition of God."[44] Kubrick's *2001* was released as the Deity was being declared dead in theological debate and by an exulting witch (Sidney Blackmer) at the end of *Rosemary's Baby* (1968). His *Full Metal Jacket* (1987) is a study of blasphemous Vietnam-era Marines who repeatedly and creatively invoked God's name in their bloody endeavors.

Being able to act authentically is a primary test of the existential person. *M*A*S*H* (1970), a Vietnam-era movie about establishment absurdities in the Korean War, contrasts the cool of military misfits with the downfall of a starchy surgeon who is a religious zealot, Major Frank Burns (Robert Duvall). "Every time a patient croaks on him he says it's God's will or somebody else's fault," another physician remarks. Other doctors, sarcastic playboys Burns calls "Godless buffoons," slip sex magazines to a Korean boy he is teaching to read the Bible. In contrast to his misbehaving adversaries, however, the major is disingenuous. When the married Burns visits the tent of a nurse (Sally Kellerman) for a tryst, he says, "I'm sure God meant us to find each other." As she exposes her breasts, she says, "His will be done." After their lovemaking is broadcast across the camp on a hidden microphone, Burns becomes enraged and is taken away in a straightjacket. Other swipes at religion include a parody of the Last Supper for a dentist planning suicide, the casual rescheduling of Yom Kippur, and a priest blessing a jeep.

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[43] Ian Watson, "Memoirs of a Kubrick Mind Slave," *New Yorker*, 22 March 1999.

The efficacy and demeanor of the contemporary God was at least severely downsized as America did not seem to be getting divine blessings anymore. Miracles were only documented by trashy tabloids and much of the trustworthy news about the world was discouraging. In the movie *Oh, God!* (1977) the Supreme Being is a casual dresser who visits a supermarket's assistant manager (John Denver) to make him his messenger to the world. God, played by comedian George Burns in the movie and its sequels, admits making mistakes and expresses surprise at the outcomes of some of his decisions. He observes that human life is mostly a matter of chance and of the choices people make. People should take delight in their senses, God advises, and can let existence mean what they think it should mean. "I gave you a world and everything in it," God says. "It's all up to you." God insists that he is "for the big picture" and does not concern himself with details or do miracles more than "maybe now and then just to keep my hand in it." The blasé Lord explains that life is a "crapshoot" and that suffering is not permitted by God, but by people with a free will. "You can love each other, cherish and nurture each other," he says. "You can kill each other."

Other cheeky films helped to transform religion into entertainment. Counter-culture Christs and pop songs are the formula for *Jesus Christ Superstar* (1973) and *Godspell* (1973). The Savior, an actor in *Jesus Christ Superstar* and a clown in *Godspell*, is placed in rock musicals with commercialized youth sensibilities. In later cases religion became the basis for star-vehicle farce. *The Blues Brothers* (1980) has two rogues (John Belushi and Dan Aykroyd) who "see the light" and save Sister Mary Stigmata's orphanage. With a deadpan delivery they frequently repeat the line "We're on a mission from God." Two other religious comedies released in 1980, *Wholly Moses* and *In God We Tru$t*, featured Richard Pryor. *Leap of Faith* (1992) finds humor in a fake faith healer (Steve Martin) trying to attract the gullible. In *Sister Act* (1992), Whoopi Goldberg plays a Nevada lounge singer who impersonates a nun while fleeing the mob and making a public success

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[44] Anthony Lane, "The Last Emperor," *New Yorker*, 22 March 1999.

of the miserable convent choir. A wandering spiritual guru (Eddie Murphy) resurrects a floundering home shopping network in *Holy Man* (1998).

In other cases, people who have made religious commitments have striking moral or mental problems. A priest faces a crisis of faith in *The Exorcist* (1973), but witnesses violent demonic possession in grotesque scenes that earned the movie an R rating. The deadly X rating or obscenity prosecutions were a possibility, but the notorious parts are in the context of church ritual and make the Devil a real force. Like other films in the satanic power genre, however, *The Exorcist* avoids opportunities for theological exposition and can be experienced as little more than a horror show.[45] A crooked Vatican official (Christopher Reeve) seduces a Carmelite postulant (Geneviève Bujold) in *Monsignor* (1982) and a court-appointed psychiatrist (Jane Fonda) investigates the case of a nun (Meg Tilly) charged with strangling her newborn baby in *Agnes of God* (1985). Spike Lee's morose *Jungle Fever* (1991) ends with the Good Reverend Doctor Purify (Ossie Davis) shoting his crack addict son (Samuel L. Jackson) and placing the pistol on an open Bible. "No other help I know," Purify says, under a picture of Jesus on the wall. "If thou withdraw thyself from me, whither shall I go?" *Soul Food* (1997) has a preacher (Carl Wright) who cannot keep his hands off of food or women. The public's readiness to trust supposedly devout public figures is portrayed as a phony politician is elected in *Bob Roberts* (1992) and as a fugitive evangelist starts a new congregation after bludgeoning his wife's lover in *The Apostle* (1997).

Movies raised troublesome theological issues more freely and more equivocally after the PCA closed down. In *Brother John* (1971), for instance, a mysterious, otherworldly man (Sidney Poitier) observes the human situation and concludes that the whole species may have to answer for the rampant injustices in prisons, Vietnam, and elsewhere. The end of the film, however, simply leaves the matter open. *Amadeus*

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[45] The filmmakers wanted to play up the horror and avoid theological content they feared would slow down the movie. See Peter Travers and Stephanie Reiff, *The Story Behind* The Exorcist (New York: Crown, 1974), 115-25.

(1984), winner of eight Academy Awards including best picture, has a bitter, suicidal composer, Antonio Salieri, ask a priest to explain God's gift of genius to a less pious Mozart and gets no satisfactory response. *The Last Temptation of Christ* has a Jesus who regards himself as a flawed human and wonders if he is the messiah. Two men in *Commandments* (1997) learn to have more respect for metaphysical mysteries. One (Aidan Quinn) decides to break all the commandments to spite God after experiencing a series of personal tragedies he attributes to the Supreme Being. "Why does God the all-powerful allow pointless suffering?" he asks. He has the opportunity to see things differently after disappearing in a storm and miraculously being found alive inside a beached whale. The other man (Anthony LaPaglia) is a reporter who does not believe in God and considers nothing sacred but his possessions. When he loses what he has he says he still does not believe in fairy tales. "But I do know that what I don't know might be a whole lot bigger than what I thought," he says as the film ends.

A moral ending can be tacked on to an otherwise disturbing treatment of temptation. In *The Devil's Advocate* (1997), Lucifer, in the guise of a prominent lawyer (Al Pacino), insists that he cannot be a puppeteer to people who have free will. "I only set the stage," he tells a young attorney (Keanu Reeves) he is attracting with wealth and privileges. "You pull your own strings." Satan says that God is a "sadist" and a "prankster" who gives humans instincts they are not supposed to obey. "I'm a fan of man," the Devil asserts. "I'm a humanist." He describes vanity as his favorite sin. "It's so basic," he says. "Self-love. The all-natural opiate." The young lawyer, however, chooses to love others at the last moment and thus escapes Satan by using the most basic religious lesson. In *The Last Temptation of Christ* the Devil, in the form of a guardian angel, lures Christ himself (or, rather, his mind) off the cross with seductive statements about enjoying the world. "Maybe you'll find this hard to believe," Satan remarks, "but sometimes we angels look down on men and envy you." Jesus eventually realizes that he has been duped and resumes the role

of Savior. Thus, in the end, a more ascetic biblical teaching is vindicated. "Set your affection on things above," Paul warned, "not on things on the earth."[46]

Some films, such as *Boogie Nights* (1997), could make libertine lifestyles extreme enough to be unattractive, but a more discernible tendency of the late twentieth century was to recognize sensual pleasure as a means of genuine, transcendent fulfillment. The "city of God" and the "earthly city," mutually exclusive in Augustinian analysis, were seemingly becoming one. The emerging, enticing doctrine of the entertainment industry was that self-indulgence is not a sin, but rather a nearly sacramental acceptance of divine gifts. Blessings seem to arrive not only for those who are good in religious terms, but also for those who want to feel good on their own terms. Even the most profligate and remorseless can be saved, especially if they serve art. In the movie *Crossroads* (1986), for instance, a Mississippi bluesman (Joe Seneca) sells his soul to the devil and shamelessly pursues a long, sinful life. The contract is torn up, however, when his young protégé (Ralph Macchio) wins a blues guitar contest set up by Satan.

The merging of the heavenly and the earthly was represented starkly in two small-budget European films that gained attention in the United States a decade apart. In *Babette's Feast* (1987), an Academy Award winner for best foreign language film, an austere pastor in nineteenth-century Denmark denies one daughter the opportunity to become an opera singer and discourages another daughter's romantic interest in a soldier. After his death, the two women continue a cloistered existence and take in Babette (Stéphane Audran), a refugee from political troubles in Paris. After years of grim toil and Spartan fare, Babette reveals that she is a culinary marvel when she wins a lottery and has the opportunity to import gourmet food. Her exotic, delectable meal transforms the late pastor's bickering followers into forgiving friends as they find something they can enjoy in life. The film parable, based on an Isak Dinesen story, makes a case for dropping the distinction between bodily and spiritual appetites and for considering the chef's skills

[46] Col. 3:2 AV.

worthy of paradise. Chided for spending all her money, Babette remarks, "An artist is never poor." Another European import, *The Tango Lesson* (1997), presents the strained relationship of two impetuous souls who apparently accept the sovereignty of art. Denying that there is "a superior power controlling what we do," the woman (Sally Potter who wrote and directed the movie) tells the man (Pablo Veron), "I believe chance gives us the opportunity to create our destiny." The film's exquisitely crafted dance sequences imply that sacred beauty can be found in the physically intense moment.

As America emerged from the Cold War, prosperous and saturated with mass media marketing pitches, physical satisfactions could be shown as enjoyable enough to rival incorporeal existence. God, presumably disdainful of self-gratifying commercial culture, could be a spoilsport. When a pastor with a variety of problems prays for help in *The Preacher's Wife* (1996), an angel (Denzel Washington) appears and is attracted to his spouse (Whitney Houston). "You have no idea what the competition is like just to be sent down here," the angel says. In *City of Angels* (1998), an angel (Nicolas Cage) falls in love with a non-believer surgeon (Meg Ryan), but then must decide if he is willing to give up his ethereal status for the earthly sensations he craves. "I would rather have had one breath of her hair, one kiss of her mouth, one touch of her hand, than an eternity without it," says the angel. "One." The surgeon discovers "there's something bigger out there" that determines the fate of her patients and the angel decides to become mortal so that he can be her lover. Angels are supposed to be capable of going astray, but making them so interested in temporal companionship suggests that heaven is hardly to be desired.

The immortal beings in such films have very human needs. *Michael* (1996) has an archangel who is visiting Iowa and unabashedly relishing fights, sugar, alcohol, tobacco, and women. The title character (John Travolta) remarks that he is "doomed to live in one place and crave the pleasures of another." His rather offhand philosophy is that people need to laugh and love. "'All you need is love,'" he says, quoting "John and Paul" of the Beatles, not of the Bible. The archangel's main tasks in the movie are smiting a tiny bank

that tries to foreclose on a widow and playing matchmaker to an often-divorced woman who writes country music and a cynical supermarket tabloid reporter who is detecting "some unknown force" at work in his life. In the film the spiritual heartland of Iowa, birthplace of American icons John Wayne, Donna Reed, and James T. Kirk, is oddly spiritual in its artlessness. Iowa is also the location of the final moments of *The Bodyguard* (1992) in which the title character, Frank Farmer (Kevin Costner), is protecting a Congressman on a dais with Rotary and United States flags. "And, Lord, whatever dangerous endeavors those among us may take, let them never be without your sanctuary," a clergyman says in benediction as the camera closes in on Farmer. "We all know in our hearts that even though we may pass through the valley of the shadow of death, you are with us, guiding and protecting us." In a reversal of the plots in which angels act human, a human seems capable of being a guardian angel.

Another movie with locations in Iowa suggest that something of the divine can be found in the simple, warm aspirations of humanity. In *Field of Dreams* (1989), a mysterious voice, provided by "Himself" according to the credits, gives enigmatic instructions to a financially troubled Iowa farmer (Kevin Costner) who is nostalgic for the Sixties. When the farmer converts a cornfield into a baseball field in response to the first message ("If you build it, he will come"), Shoeless Joe Jackson, a player banned from baseball after the 1919 World Series scandal, appears and asks, "Is this heaven?" The astonished farmer replies, "No, it's Iowa." Eventually, Jackson, other dead players, and men who dreamed of being in the major leagues, including the farmer's deceased father, are using the field and savoring the sensory experiences of the sport. The field, one of the characters says, "reminds us of all that once was good, and that could be again." By the end of the movie the farmer and his father have repaired their strained relationship and the others have overcome their disappointments in life. When his father asks if he is in heaven and defines it as "the place dreams come true," the farmer says that maybe he is in heaven.

IV.

Making dreams come true is now, more than ever, the business of Hollywood. Marketing tactics are creating consumer confections. Films with religious ingredients must please rather than prod or provoke audiences. Death, for instance, has little sting in the highly market-driven movies of the late twentieth century. Love can still be found. The Albert Brooks fantasy *Defending Your Life* (1991), for example, puts the recently deceased in Judgment City, a pleasant, smoothly operated complex where scenes from their lives are replayed in courtroom-style proceedings to determine whether they must go back to earth for another life or they qualify for a higher level of citizenship in the universe. Hell does not exist. The main character (Brooks), a borderline case at best, manages to advance after demonstrating love and courage in a relationship with a woman (Meryl Streep) he meets in the hereafter. Love overcomes death in *What Dreams May Come* (1998) as a kindly doctor (Robin Williams) in a Heaven of his choice goes on a rescue mission for his depressed wife (Annabella Sciorra) who is in a Hell of her own making. (She has committed suicide after he and their children are killed in accidents.) The redeeming physician (naturally named "Chris") and his wife are "soulmates" who make it to Heaven, but decide to take the readily available reincarnation option so that they can fall in love again and make different choices. *Meet Joe Black* (1998) has a recently deceased man (Brad Pitt) become the Grim Reaper, visit an ailing tycoon (Anthony Hopkins), form an amorous relationship with his lovely doctor daughter (Claire Forlani), and gently escort the good-natured old man to "the next place."

Reviewers reacted with sarcasm to the abundance of such films in the 1990s. "Dare we suggest that the boomers who now control Hollywood are exhibiting a touch of, um, *denial*?" asked a *Newsweek* article. The trouble with this easygoing faith, said a *Time* critique, is a New Age conceit: "Forgive yourself and cue the beautiful music." A *New York Times* review razzed, "Oh, to die in a sugar-coated Hollywood movie while the

spiritual schmaltz craze is under way!"[47] The formula, however, was not merely a passing fad. Other films in which the dead return in body or spirit include *On a Clear Day You Can See Forever* (1970), *The Reincarnation of Peter Proud* (1975), *Heaven Can Wait* (1978), *Oh, Heavenly Dog!* (1980), *Star Trek III: The Search for Spock* (1984), *The Wraith* (1986), *Out on a Limb* (television, 1987), *Chances Are* (1989), *Always* (1989), *Dead Again* (1991), *Hi, Honey-I'm Dead* (television, 1991), *Heart and Souls* (1993), *Little Buddha* (1993), *Being Human* (1993), *Fluke* (1995), and *Jack Frost* (1998). Attempting as always to keep religion palatable, the movie industry distanced itself from the prospect of harsh judgments by God in the last few decades of the century. The biblical was being replaced by the mystical and fanciful as the studios attempted to concoct audience-satisfying stories.

Even the best-known purveyor of family entertainment, the Walt Disney Company, avoided conventional treatments of religion in the 1990s. Its *The Three Musketeers* (1993) makes Cardinal Richelieu (Tim Curry) a worse character than in the Alexandre Dumas novel. Richelieu plots to assassinate the king and lusts after the queen. Another sign of the transformation was Disney's Miramax distribution of *Priest* (1994), an R-rated British film about the sex lives of two parish priests and the child abuse in one of the church's families. Plans for release of the film on Good Friday were changed when the Catholic League threatened to boycott Disney.[48] Disney invited more complaints when its animated *Pocahontas* (1995) gave the title character a New Age spirituality of human connection and left out the historical person's conversion to Christianity.

The voice of Pocahontas was provided by Demi Moore who was at the time appearing as an unrepentant adulterer at odds with the Puritan community in *The Scarlet Letter* (1995), a film by other companies that gave the two lovers sex scenes and an escape to a life together they did not have in the Nathaniel Hawthorne novel. The novel ended

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[47] David Ansen, "Death Takes a Hike," *Newsweek*, 28 December 1998-4 January 1999; Bruce Handy, "Death Takes a Meeting," *Time*, 23 November 1998; Janet Maslin, "When Death Comes to Call, Serve Peanut Butter," *New York Times*, 13 November 1998, national edition.

with a guilt-stricken Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale admitting his transgression and praising God for punishing him. "His will be done!" Dimmesdale says with his dying breath. "Farewell!"[49] The movie, a box office bomb described as "freely adapted" in the credits, tries to turn the book into a bodice-ripper romance with only ersatz psychological torment. *The Scarlet Letter* ends with a defiant Arthur (Gary Oldman) asking, "Who are we to condemn on God's behalf?" The voice of his daughter Pearl (Jodhi May) describes the happiness her parents find in another colony and wonders, "Who is to say what is a sin in God's eyes?" The implication is that the judgmental Puritans, seen as an impediment to the honest love of a man and woman, sin themselves with self-righteous interpretations of divine will. God, it would seem, should be more interested in attraction than antipathy.

Disney's *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1996) also distorts an important novel with religious characters and rigs up a happy ending. In Victor Hugo's book, the villain is a sanctimonious archdeacon who pursues the beautiful gypsy Esmeralda. In the Disney-animated film, as in the Hollywood's live-action versions of 1923 and 1939, the studio guarded against criticism from religious groups by making the archdeacon a kindly, protective figure who reminds the characters about God's power.[50] Esmeralda is unjustly executed in the novel, but, in a clear concession to audience preferences, she survives and ends up with a handsome man in each of the three movies. In the Disney version the scoundrel is a cruel, pharisaic judge, Frollo, who takes genocidal measures against gypsies and blames Esmeralda for his sexual desire. He prays to the Virgin Mary to let him have Esmeralda or to destroy her. "It's not my fault if in God's plan," Frollo sings before his timely death, "he made the devil so much stronger than a man." Esmeralda pleads for help in a song sung to a statue of Mary and baby Jesus as others in the cathedral ask for wealth,

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[48] Richard Corliss, "God and Man in Liverpool," *Time*, 10 April 1995.
[49] Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, ed. Ross C. Murfin (Boston: St. Martin's Press, 1991), 197.
[50] In approving the 1939 film, the Hays Office noted that the clergy character was treated sympathetically and that religious ceremonies were handled satisfactorily. Certificate of Approval, 19 October 1939, *Hunchback of Notre Dame* file, PCA Collection.

glory, and love. "Please help my people, the poor and downtrod," she says. "I thought we all were the children of God."

Although Disney evidently learned to take some precautions, religious topics proved treacherous. The company used a producer and a lyricist with well-established Christian credentials for *Hunchback*, but the film received conservative criticism for its political message and its portrayal of a twisted religious zealot. Extensive test-screenings did not reveal many concerns. "The only thing we've been asked to be careful about is the word hunchback, which we have to use in the title," said Peter Schneider, president of Walt Disney Feature Animation.[51] In 1999, apparently weary of fighting religious battles, Disney announced it would not put its Miramax label on *Dogma*, a film with singer Alanis Morissette as God and with seeming satire of Catholic beliefs. Writer-director Kevin Smith, a practicing Catholic, described the movie as a "love letter to both faith and God Almighty," but a Disney executive, speaking on the condition of anonymity, said the film was "inappropriate for all of our labels."[52]

Marketing considerations played a major role in DreamWorks SKG decisions about *The Prince of Egypt* (1998), an animated epic that verged on making Moses a generic movie hero. In order to avoid offending Christians, Muslims, and Jews, the filmmakers consulted hundreds of scholars and religious leaders and rejected fast-food tie-ins and toy spinoffs. Although aimed at adults and older children, the movie makes God a blander presence than in the Bible.[53] The animators created a multiethnic slave population and considered morphing the voice of God from man to woman to child, an idea vetoed by an adviser who thought some people would be offended by the female sound. "We can never

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[51] Bob Straus, "'Hunchback' Carries Many Weighty Issues," *Los Angeles Daily News*, 15 June, 1996, metro edition; Bob Straus, "Artistically Correct?" *Boston Globe*, 16 June 1996, city edition (quotation); James Bowman, "Disney's Mickey Mouse Religion," *Weekly Standard*, 1 July 1996; Mark I. Pinsky, "Disney Gets Dramatic, 'Hunchback' Tackles the Christian Faith," *(Jacksonville) Florida Times-Union*, 5 July 1996, city edition.

[52] Bernard Weinraub, "Disney and Miramax Collide Over Church Issues in New Film," *New York Times*, 8 April 1999, national edition.

be a literal retelling of the Bible," said DreamWorks' Jeffrey Katzenberg. "We've edited God, but we have not rewritten him."[54] The movie did take some liberties with the story of Moses and God's interventions, but the product avoided reproach. "It may sound like art-by-committee," a *Newsweek* article said, "but it's probably just good business-getting the most powerful critics inside the tent."[55]

Another DreamWorks film released in 1998, *Deep Impact*, has the citizens of the United States behave with considerable decency as a comet threatens to wipe out life on the planet. The "Messiah Mission" is launched into space to stop the disaster, but runs into trouble. The president (Morgan Freeman) tells a television audience that he believes in a God who hears all prayers even if the wishes are not always granted. "So may the Lord bless you," he says, "may the Lord keep you, may the Lord lift up his divine countenance upon you and give you peace." Steven Spielberg, one of the executive producers of the film and a DreamWorks founder, once again combined escapist entertainment and honeyed, moral uplift. In *Armageddon* (1998), a similar special effects extravaganza distributed the same year, a rowdy oil-drilling team is recruited to place a nuclear bomb deep in an asteroid headed for earth. As they face frightening situations the characters utter pleas for divine intervention. "C'mon, God, just a little help," says the team's leader (Bruce Willis) at one point. "That's all I'm askin'." In both *Deep Impact* and *Armageddon* human technology fails to some extent and the conclusion could be drawn that the prayers are answered, at least for good, heroic people who want help from a power beyond their own. Nothing, however, clears up the ambiguity about divine intervention. At most God is a *deus ex machina*, a remote control device of last resort.

Another 1998 movie, *The Truman Show*, seems to find end-of-the-world implications in the power of mass culture to fabricate realities that drain the meaning from

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[53] Jeff Giles, "Down by the River," *Newsweek*, 14 December 1998; Bernard Weinraub, "A Cartoon's Dancing Teapots? Funny Camels? Not for 'Prince of Egypt,'" *New York Times*, 14 December 1998, national edition.
[54] Kim Masters, "The Prince and the Promoter," *Time*, 14 December 1998.
[55] Matthew Cooper, "Hollywood and Divine," *Newsweek*, 30 March 1998.

existence. In the film a public with little detectable interest in spiritual life is enthralled by the kind of signs and wonders the Bible says will delude humanity before the coming of the Son of Man.[56] Truman Burbank (Jim Carrey) begins to realize that his whole highly agreeable life has been the subject of an uninterrupted television show and that the people he knows are actors on an enormous soundstage. (The character's surname is presumably a reference to the California city where the Walt Disney Company and other media companies are based.) The lawless, deceiving Antichrist of the story, Christof (Ed Harris), has been directing all of Truman's life experiences from a control room. When Truman manages to elude the gaze of the hidden cameras one night, the cast and extras are ordered to search for him. "Cue the sun!" Cristof says. Discovered escaping by sailboat, Truman survives a contrived storm at sea (that leaves him in a crucifixion posture) and (after seemingly walking on water) he climbs a stairway to a door in the sky at the edge of the scenery. Cristof patronizingly pleads with him not to leave the safe, consumer-friendly surroundings. "I am the creator," Christof explains with a pause after "creator," "of a television show that gives hope and joy and inspiration to millions." Watching at her home is the woman of Truman's dreams (Natascha McElhone), a person who earlier had attempted to reveal to him what was happening. "Please, God," she says at the moment of his decision. "You can do it." Despite the decades of deceit, Truman is able to walk away from his artificial confinement. While other movies, such as *Mad City* (1997) and *Wag the Dog* (1997), were deriding television content being molded by media managers and manipulative politicians, *The Truman Show* presented a broader, eschatological indictment of a culture susceptible to voyeuristic entertainment and earthly bliss.

The evil of techno-corporate domination is taken a step further in *The Matrix* (1999), a sci-fi thriller in which artificial-intelligence machinery has taken over the future world. People are mere power sources placated with computer-generated versions of life.

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[56] On beliefs that television and other developments are indications of the Antichrist and the Second Coming, see Paul Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992).

Rebels live in the unseen city of Zion far below the surface of earth and await a messianic figure heralded as "the One." The savior is computer hacker Thomas "Neo" Anderson (Keanu Reeves) who is betrayed by a follower and killed by agents of the Matrix after a series of hyper-violent encounters. Resurrected by the love of Trinity (Carrie-Anne Moss), he is able to free the enslaved population. In accord with the "emotional intelligence" self-help books of the late 1990s, the messiah ultimately prevails by mastering his feelings rather than using his prodigious ferocity.[57] In addition to the modernized story of Christ, *The Matrix* uses a mélange of references to other reservoirs of deep meaning. "We're interested in mythology, theology and, to a certain extent, higher mathematics," said Larry Wachowski who wrote and directed the film with his brother Andy. "All are ways human beings try to answer bigger questions, as well as The Big Question."[58]

The medium of film offers fertile ground for perspectives on Providence. Hollywood's God can intervene or inspire as well as be mysterious or disinterested. As self-regulation moved from the code era to the ratings era, the movie business gained considerable freedom to reshape, question, and even ridicule divine powers. The problem of what God actually does or does not do in the world is now open to the imagination of filmmakers. Public opinion and personal beliefs, however, are still factors in the final product. After battling the Catholic League over *Dogma* during much of 1999, Miramax began considering the elimination of scenes in which angels (Matt Damon and Ben Affleck) spray bullets at a corporate board and outside a church. Director Kevin Smith said school shooting deaths in the real world had to be considered. At the same time Arnold Schwarzenegger hesitated to act in *End of Days*, a millennium film he thought could be not only violent but also offensive to religion. He said he decided to go ahead only after

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[57] The books were spawned by the success of Daniel Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence* (New York: Bantam Books, 1995).
[58] Richard Corliss, "Popular Metaphysics," *Time*, 19 April 1999.

getting approval from his family priest.[59] Meanwhile, the secretive ratings board of the MPAA, which consists of parents, was obtaining changes in *South Park: Bigger, Longer and Uncut* (1999) so that it could be released with an R rating instead of the more restrictive NC-17. According to leaked Paramount memos, one of the concerns was disrespect for God.[60]

The cinema can keep exploring the divine because religion, or some version of it, sells. Audiences are apparently willing to suspend disbelief and belief long enough to indulge in a pleasurable pastime that deals with the most fundamental issues humanity faces. As director Richard Donner demonstrated with the Antichrist in *The Omen* (1976) and the savior-hero from Krypton in *Superman* (1978), even an antagonist of God or a God substitute can be intriguing enough to justify multiple sequels. As the films of the twentieth century show, humans can cringe, be comforted, or be confused enough to fall back on their own resources when thinking about unearthly forces. Believers may not accept the theology in motion pictures and religious institutions may not always appreciate the alternative sources of communication, but the history and culture of Hollywood indicate that the collision of creeds and popular culture is unavoidable. People have a natural interest in what God and God's opponents might be doing. The entertainment industry can embrace and exploit nearly any subject of interest to paying customers. The results can range from the profound to parody. Even the Supreme Being cannot avoid becoming fodder for amusement.

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[59] Adam Cohen, "Bullets Over Hollywood," *Time*, 28 June 1999.
[60] Bernard Weinraub, "Loosening a Strict Film Rating for 'South Park,'" *New York Times*, 29 June 1999, national edition.

The Press and the "Greening of Religion":
Themes, Sources, and Conflict in Newspaper Coverage of Faith-based Environmentalism

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates news coverage of environmental activity among American religious groups in the 1990s. The press, in reporting this phenomenon, presented a façade of religious inclusiveness while consistently reporting the story in ways that focused on traditional American religious institutions. In addition, official sources were called upon much more frequently than unofficial sources. Finally, reporters tended to downplay conflict in stories, using novelty as the key news value and attempting to extend that novelty over several years of reporting.

Introduction

Anecdotal evidence suggests that there has been some increase in environmental consciousness among religious groups in our country. To cite one example, the increasingly powerful world of Christian publishing put out numerous books in the 1990s delving into ecological matters from a theological perspective (for example, Basney, 1994; Campolo, 1992; Van Dyke, Mahan, Sheldon, & Brand, 1996; Wilkinson & Wilkinson, 1992). Part of this might be a reflection of a possible increase in environmental consciousness in the general culture, as indicated by some polls. On the other hand, a change within the religious community might be taking place that is significantly different from other facets of our society.

The purpose of this study is to determine the nature of media coverage of the putative religious-based environmental movement of the 1990s. The rationale for such study is simple. Only a small amount of research has been conducted on news coverage of religion in America. Certain aspects of media and religion have been of great interest to scholars. For example, televangelism has received ample treatment, even into the 1990s (for example, Abelman, 1990; Timmerman and Smith, 1994; Abelman, 1995), much of this research related to rhetoric and political power. In contrast, the quotidian media coverage (or lack thereof) of the religious characteristics of the earth's people and how those characteristics interact with other factors in social existence has received little coverage in recent years. As religious demographics presumably continue to change certainly updating of this information is important.

Method

Given the broad purpose of this introductory investigation, the intent was to find news stories that focused on the connection between religious belief and environmental thinking and action. I therefore sought news stories whose main interest was the presumed growth in religious environmentalism.

The focus of the study was limited to a specific medium, print journalism, concentrating on three national dailies, *The New York Times*, *The Los Angeles Times*, and *The Washington Post*. These three publications represent well-respected journalistic institutions, as well as giving both East and West Coast perspectives and a view from the nation's capital.

To find articles in these papers, I performed a search in an electronic database that allowed full-text keyword searches for all articles published between January 1970 and December 1998. I began searching with combinations of words that would presumably be included in appropriate articles (e.g., religion and environment, theology and ecology). After finding an initial set of articles using this method, I used key words from these articles (words that had not been anticipated but were logical to the reporters) to search again. I also used subject headings under which initial articles were listed in order to search for others.

The difficulty with full-text searches is narrowing the field of investigation. For the purposes of this study, only articles whose main focus was religious environmentalism were included. News articles that focused on specific environmental problems and included passing references to theologically based analyses were not considered. Likewise, stories about speeches or conferences that might have included theological dimensions were not considered unless the

occurrence was used as a starting point for a broader article on the movement. Given the breadth of the subject and its "evergreen" nature (stories encountered could have been held for release with few negative repercussions), these stories tended to be feature articles rather than hard news. Finally, commentaries/editorials were considered to be a separate entity and were excluded from analysis.

In the end, I encountered and analyzed seven articles. *The Los Angeles Times* published three articles during the period of investigation. *The Washington Post* likewise presented three articles on the subject. Finally, *The New York Times* provided one article.

Temporal Sequence and Main Themes

By indications given from the articles chosen, the mainstream press does appear to believe that religious-based environmentalism is a relatively new phenomenon. Though coverage of the environmental movement dates back to at least the first Earth Day in 1970, none of the three newspapers investigated published a story about the religious dimensions of environmentalism in the 1970s or 1980s.

In April of 1990, The *Los Angeles Times* was the first paper to claim knowledge of the newly perceived movement. Interestingly enough, the first general story covering religious-inspired environmentalism was part of a series on the twenty year anniversary of Earth Day. In the article, Russell Chandler (1990) stated "Organized religion has joined the front lines of the environmental movement" (p. A3). Moreover, the author stated that until recently, most religious

groups had focused on issues other than the environment. The key point of the article was that something new was afoot.

Less than a month later, Laura Sessions Stepp (1990) of *The Washington Post* wrote of the "growing number" (p. A8) or clergy and theologians who were becoming concerned about the environment and the possibility that religious people could attend to increasing problems related to it. Though a theme of the article was that some of the earth's problems might have been caused by faulty theology (dominion theology), the author balances that theme with an assessment of a growing awareness of environmental problems by those with faith in God. The leaders of religious groups are especially highlighted, pointing out that "if they can change the beliefs of the millions of Americans who go to church every week, the environmental movement will begin to have a more profound impact on personal behavior, business practices and politics" (Stepp, 1990, p. A8).

With no apparent connection to these assessments, *The Post* ran another story in April of 1994. Though written by Gustav Niebuhr, a different staff writer for the paper, the second piece had a strongly similar theme. In fact, one might argue that there was a certain logic to the progression in the two stories *The Post* ran. In the first, the claim was that clergy and theologians had recognized the need for spiritual environmentalism. In the second, the claim was that "the idea that religious people have a special responsibility to care for the planet is spreading" (Niebuhr, 1994, p. A5).

At this time when columnists from *The Post* had recognized both the impetus and the spread of religious environmentalism, America's newspaper of record chimed in. *The New York Times* made its only announcement of the greening of American religion in November of 1994.

The claim of a completely new phenomenon was downplayed, but growth was not. In their words "More and more religious groups nationwide are choosing to renew—or begin—an examination of their responsibility to the environment" (Gonzalez, 1994, p. I34). This was the only time *The New York Times* reported about these changes.

Both of the other papers chose to revisit the issue. Almost seven years after their initial report on the "greening of religion" (Chandler, 1990, p. A3), *The LA Times* turned to the subject a second time. This instance showed less corporate memory than *The Washington Post's* second sojourn in 1994. Where previously *The Times* had claimed that "organized religion has joined the front lines of the environmental movement" (Chandler, 1990, p. A3), they now were writing "It is an idea that is taking hold among a small but diverse group of religious figures" (Gerstenzang, 1997, p. 5). A perceptive reader might feel that either little has changed in seven years, or even that religious environmentalism has taken a step backward.

The Washington Post might be accused of a similar level of memory loss when they visited the story a third time. This time the theme sentence was "Americans of all faiths increasingly are looking at the environment through a spiritual lens" (Murphy, 1998, p. A1). There is no mention of either of the previous reports, and nothing to add a significant new dimension to the story.

Finally, late in 1998 *The LA Times* ran its third story on the subject. In this instance *The Times* did not repeat the mistake it made in 1997. The basic theme of the story was slightly different. Here, the issue was the fact that the environmental movement might be "dramatically reshaped by the fervent forces of God" (Watanabe, 1998, p. I1). Much of the discussion moves beyond earlier issues to investigate the efficacy of burgeoning religious ecology.

Religion, Wide and Narrow

A number of earlier studies (Buddenbaum, 1986; Hynds, 1987; Buddenbaum, 1990) have demonstrated that within the limited coverage given to religion within the secular press, Christianity and Judaism are most prominent. This study supports those general findings but also finds some differences between the way stories are framed (to include "religion" broadly defined) and the way that framing is supported in the text itself.

Worth noting is that the framing of the stories is consistently broad. The headlines of all seven stories are listed in Table 1. The reader should note that five of the headlines use the same broad term to frame their story. In these five stories, the subject matter is set up as a "religious" movement (or movement within "religions"). There are few ways the editors could have made the story broader within the field of religion. On the other hand, there *are* conscious choices that could have been made to narrow the frame. For example, only one of the articles (Watanabe) uses the term "God" in the headline. Such use limits the field of the religious slightly by excluding (among semantic purists) polytheists. Only one article used a headline that was narrowly delimited in easily noticed theological terms. Stepp's (1990) use of "Garden of Eden" stands as a reference to the Hebrew tradition (also recognized by Christians) of God placing Adam and Eve in a garden he created for them. Numerous other religions would have no connection with this narrative. The *Post* editors also chose to use the word "church" in the headline, a term that would be limiting if taken in a theologically pure sense of the word (historically related to Greek word for "lord"). More loosely exclusive is Chandler's (1990) use

of the term "crusade" in his headline. If one takes into account the etymology of the term, connections with Christianity are clear and exclusive to other religions.

When we move beyond headlines to story themes, these reports remain at a broadly inclusive level. Table 2 includes sentences considered to be themes for each story. The reader should note that five of the reporters used terminology that is very broad and extremely inclusive of diverse religious experience. Three of these five used either "religion" or "religious" to describe their subject. The other three used "faiths" (Murphy, 1990), "theological perspective" (Gerstenzang, 1997), and the "fervent forces of God" (Watanabe, 1998). Only Stepp (1990), who also was less inclusive in her headline, narrowed the field of religious experience by referring to "Bible stories" at this juncture of her report. Other than this instance, reporters appear to be claiming that adherents of widely diverse religious beliefs are seeing increased environmental activism.

Yet when the bodies of the various stories are analyzed, this does not prove to be the case. One story (Stepp, 1990) demonstrated a high level of consistency by limiting her analysis to Protestant Christians and Roman Catholics. Given the use of the term "churches" and references to Eden in the headline of the story, this made sense. The reader should recall that Stepp also used a rather exclusive theme line.

All of the other stories had much more inclusive headlines and themes, yet they failed to be broadly inclusive in their text. All six reports made references to Protestant Christian denominations, Roman Catholicism, and Judaism. However, four of the six stories (Niebuhr; Gonzalez, 1994; Gerstenzang, 1997; Murphy, 1998) went no farther than this. No other religious

groups were presented to exemplify the claim that "religious" people are becoming more environmentally active.

Certainly we can recognize that this is not unusual given American cultural history and demographics. Traditionally speaking, the three religious experiences listed in these stories represent the bulk of American faiths. Yet terminology used in headlines and themes might have lead the reader to believe these stories were much broader in their focus. Such a broad description might be illogical at its face. In spite of attempts to draw the "greening of religion" as a movement within diverse theological circles, the place where "greening" would be most obvious would be among a group which is presumed to be antithetical to many aspects of environmentalism, the evangelical wing of Protestant Christianity. Put differently, evangelical theology separates God from his creation and humankind from other elements therein. Other religions do not necessarily share this cultural heritage. Hence, a "greening" would be much more noticeable within evangelical Christians than it would among animists.

Interestingly enough, it was the very first and last (chronologically) in this series of stories that made references to religious experiences other than those dominant in American cultural history. In his 1990 story that first called attention to religious environmentalism, Chandler referred to Buddhists in his story. In the most recent expose of the religious environmentalism phenomenon, Watanabe (1998) referred to Islam and Shintoism. Both of these references were extremely brief with no elaboration. The Dalai Lama was the only person outside the Judeo-Christian tradition who was quoted in an article.

Official Versus Unofficial Attributed Sources

This leads to the issue of who is actually given voice in the stories themselves. Implicit in two classic studies of the media (Gans, 1974; Tuchman, 1978) is the idea that news organizations tend to set up routines by which they gather the news. As reporters follow these routines, "official" sources (especially government sources) are the most likely means by which information on a story is obtained. More recent studies (Greenberg, Sandman, Sachman, & Salomone, 1989; Smith, 1993) have shown that within the field of environmental reporting itself government representatives are the most frequent sources of information. Without such research in hand, one might presume that in news coverage of religion, individual members of religious groups would be seen on equal footing with "official" sources of any kind. More bluntly, if the story is how religious peoples are developing a strong environmental ethic, one would presume that individual believers within the country's religious bodies would be worthy of quotation. Even so, Hart, Turner, and Knupp (1981) found in their study of religious coverage in *Time* magazine that lay people tended to be featured less than eight percent of the time. The issue is certainly worth further investigation here.

In the seven stories studied, individual people of faith appear to have little value to the journalistic community. For purposes of this study, every individual who was attributed with a quote was noted. Some individuals were noted more than once because they were quoted within more than one story. Each of these individuals was also checked for title and/or affiliation. Table 3 illustrates the breakdown of attributed quotes and the categories into which sources were placed. Only three of out of the total of 57 attributed quotes were simple congregants and not

listed as part of the clergy, a religious-affiliated organization, a traditional environmental group, a governmental or political organization. In fact, one quote was placed in the "religious congregant" category even though the quote was simply attributed to "a congregant" (Watanabe, 1998, p. A1) and appears to have been passed on to the reporter by the individual's Rabbi. Only two other sources in the stories were judged to be individuals representing a religious body (without an official role). One of those was a member of a Mennonite church who commented on water quality in a local river (Murphy, 1998). The other was a member of a Presbyterian church who wrote an environmental column in the church newsletter (Watanabe, 1998).

Clergy, church staff members, and members of religious-affiliated organizations were all quoted often. Among the first category, quotes were well distributed among Protestants, Roman Catholics, and Jews. As noted earlier, the Dalai Lama was the only attributed source who did not fall in these three broad categories. Only one individual was quoted (very briefly at that) in more than one story. That person was Pope John Paul II (Chandler, 1990; Murphy, 1998).

Church staffers and representatives of religious-affiliated organizations were also very well quoted. Among these were religious organizations that are often called upon by reporters delving into religion. Examples include the National Council of Churches (Gonzalez, 1994) and the US Catholic Conference of Bishops (Murphy, 1998). In addition, there were many lesser-known religious organizations that were quoted, many of them created specifically to deal with environmental issues. Among these were the Christian Nature Foundation (Chandler, 1990) and the Evangelical Environmental Network (Murphy, 1998; Watanabe, 1998). Stan LeQuire of the latter organization was quoted in two articles. Most quoted among all attributed sources (of any category) was Paul Gorman of the National Religious Partnership for the Environment. Five of

the seven reporters (Gonzalez, 1994; Niebuhr, 1994; Gerstenzang, 1997; Murphy, 1998; Watanabe, 1998) put his words in print.

Given the subject matter, two other results were somewhat surprising. Traditional environmental groups were not called upon often to speak to the issues addressed in these articles. Two members of the Sierra Club were asked to comment on the phenomenon under discussion (Gonzalez, 1994; Watanabe, 1998). The other two sources were representatives of the organization that sponsors Earth Day. Both of these appeared in one story that was partly framed around an Earth Day anniversary (Chandler, 1990). The other surprising element is that governmental/political officials were called upon to comment on the movement more than representatives of secular environmental organizations were.

Conflict as a News Value

Who speaks in news stories if often a function of the presence of conflict (Berkowitz and Beach, 1993). Conflict is a ubiquitous rationale for news stories, and American news organizations tend to see conflict as two groups competing on an issue. To increase the appearance of objectivity in stories, journalists have a tendency to gather quotes from "both sides" of the issue and allow both to speak (Berkowitz and Beach, 1993).

New stories dealing with religion have tended to show a similar pattern. In fact, Hart, Turner, and Knupp (1981) found that over 80% of studies in Time Magazine from 1940s to 1970s "were primarily concerned with conflict"(p. 62). Buddenbaum (1990) found that in television news conflict and violence were the two most common news values. Maus (1990)

claimed in his study of the media and evangelicals that reporters suddenly develop an acute interest in evangelical Christianity when ecclesiastical affairs turn into "partisan politics"(254). Theological discussion is presumed to be of interest to few readers, listeners, or viewers. Antagonism within a religious body cries out for an audience.

Adding to the appeal to find conflict is the environmental angle of the stories we are investigating. Lange (1993) makes a reasoned claim that any story about the environment is likely to be conflict oriented by virtue of the simple fact that natural resources are scarce entities. Moreover, environmentalism as a human phenomenon is akin to other social movements of the late twentieth century in its clamor to get a message to the general public through sophisticated media over which they have little direct control. Gitlin (1980) has demonstrated that conflict—though often detrimental to long-term goals of a group—is one sure way of getting media attention.

Given this setting, one might expect that the coverage of increased environmental activity within American religious groups would include a rather high level of conflict within stories. This expectation was investigated, using a simple definition of conflict. In one of the most commonly used texts for teaching journalism students the tools of their trade, conflict is defined as "Events that reflect clashes between people or institutions" (Mencher, 1997, p. 61).

Only a small number of such clashes appeared in the seven stories studied here. Most of those might be better described as "skirmishes" compared to the most dramatic news coverage of some environmental groups. And, these skirmishes were often given very superficial examination within the stories themselves. For a genuine clash (given Mencher's definition), at least two individuals or entities need to be portrayed. In most of the articles studied here, there

were numerous activities described in which only one party was involved (at least, as described in the news report). For example, Niebuhr—in whose work I found the lowest level of conflict—described the activities of several religious groups as if they occurred in a vacuum.

> "For example, a Pennsylvania Lutheran congregation pitched in to clean up a local highway, while Presbyterians in upstate New York made protecting a village stream their project, monitoring it and state officials" (Niebuhr, 1994, p. A5).

Murphy (1998) offers similar non-conflict examples:

> "Suse Greenstone persuaded Community Lutheran Church in Sterling to let her and other congregation members create the Hedgerow Habitat Trail. Deemed a way to protect church property from urban sprawl, the small nature walk is planted with native shrubbery and features Scripture. In Harrisburg, Va., Tom Finger and several other members of the Community Mennonite Church have helped clean up Blacks Run and are gathering biological data from fish to document the river's pollution" (p. 1).

The careful reader will note in both of the newspaper excerpts that there was potential to describe the events as conflict-laden, but the reporter chose not to do so. In fact, the wording of the articles hints at the potential. The Pennsylvania congregation's actions (cleaning up) are necessitated by another group that does not share its values. More obviously, in Murphy, the idea that the congregation needs to "protect" its property implies an invasion from another group. Yet in both of these examples the evasion of conflict-laden wording is very subtle.

In other places, reporters' avoidance of such wording seems more obvious. One article, for example, reported of a church in Richmond, California that was concerned about a nearby polluter. Chandler's (1990) wording, though, made it sound as if the plant operated

autonomously. The story told of the church which was "fighting toxic air emissions from a nearby hazardous waste incinerator" (p. A26). For a greater sense of conflict, the writer could have mentioned the operators of the plant, and perhaps asked a representative to speak. A nearly identical pattern is found in Gonzalez (1994) where the journalist reported how the Sierra Club had helped some religious groups in poor communities "organize against pollution" (p. I34). Pollution is, of course, an inanimate object. Though conflict stories are occasionally written of inanimate objects, such objects are usually forces of nature (natural disasters) not products of humankind. The reporter could have just as easily described how the environmental organization helped the religious groups "organize against polluters." Niebuhr (1994) shows similar avoidance of wording that engenders conflict when he describes how a group of Episcopal priests lobbied "against toxic waste dumping in the area"(p. A5). As worded, the reader gets no sense of who the proponents of such dumping are and what their motives for action are.

Writers presented such antagonists clearly in only a few stories. In those instances, the antagonist was listed briefly and rarely spoke. Three instances were described in which religious environmentalists clashed with other groups. Gonzalez (1994) made vague reference to the way some religious groups had begun "demanding action from public officials"(p. I34). No specific instances were mentioned, and no public officials were named or allowed to respond. Two articles (Murphy 1998; Watanabe, 1998) made reference to the fact that religious groups played some part in stymieing Congressional attempts to weaken the Endangered Species Act. Watanabe provided a brief response from the one of the antagonists in that conflict, a Congressional Representative who was in favor of changes in the act. Finally, Watanabe also described how Jewish environmentalists were instrumental in convincing Charles Hurwitz

(himself Jewish) to alter his plans for logging the Headwaters Forest. Neither Hurwitz nor any representative of his lumber company was quoted in the story.

More prevalent in the stories were accounts of conflict within religion itself. Chandler (1990) and Stepp (1990) discussed the competition that environmentalism creates for limited funds within religious groups. If tending to the needs of the poor was a traditional duty of the church, how would it do so when money and energy were re-routed? Though nobody was quoted, Stepp attributed this point of view to "minority clerics and mainstream Protestants working for social justice" (p. A8). Chandler simply attributed the point of view to "some religious activists" (p. A27).

The more recurring conflict within the religious groups themselves was the conflict in interpreting theology. Three reporters (Chandler, 1990; Gerstenzang, 1997; Watanabe; 1998) alluded to disagreements within religious groups about links between environmentalism and New Age spirituality or Paganism. Antagonists in the conflict were worried that increased involvement in environmentalism would blur the lines between Judeo-Christian theology and these competing world-views. In one case (Watanabe, 1998), a representative of the opposing view (those who were cautious of environmentalism because of perceived New Age influences) was clearly defined and a quote was presented.

Even more common were allusions to conflicting interpretations—specifically Jewish and Christian—of theology about humankind's role in the environment. Four different reporters (Chandler, 1990; Stepp, 1990; Murphy, 1997; Watanabe, 1998) made specific reference to interpretations of the Genesis account of creation, all of them either using the term "dominion" or "domination." Each made the point that there has been great disagreement on the extent to

which Adam was given dominion over creation. Watanabe claimed that the conflict still exists. "The idea that man rightfully dominates nature still holds power among some faithful, including many struggling for a living off timber and other natural resources" (Watanabe, 1998, p. A26). The other authors used the issue of dominion theology to lead into a discussion of interpretations that dominate the religious environmental movement. Though several quotes were attributed to clergy or other speakers who espoused one of these interpretations, no spokesperson was presented for a dominion theology interpretation.

In general, reporters appear to have avoided conflict as the key news value in these stories. Though conflict was present in most stories at some level, it was not dramatic, and was often toned down by wording that ignored one side of an issue. Theological conflict was present, but even then only for brief sections of the stories. The recurring news value appears to have been novelty, which is demonstrated in the headlines and themes presented earlier.

Summary

In examining news coverage of religious-based environmentalism, then, four important findings are worth reiterating. Each of these findings is somewhat tentative given the limited nature of this study. On the other hand, all suggest important areas for further investigation.

First, the mainstream press seems to have limited memory when dealing with religious issues in a feature setting. In this instance, two of the newspapers examined not only informed us of the growth of theologically-motivated environmentalism once, but came back two more times

to survey the phenomenon. Other scholars might wish to examine this situation more carefully, with special attention to motivations for repetition and potential impact of such.

A second important finding of this study was that the newspapers that were investigated tended to frame their stories rather inclusively, yet write their stories rather exclusively. Headlines and theme sentences early in the stories used wording that would incorporate diverse forms of religious experience, yet the bodies of the stories tended to focus on Protestantism, Roman Catholicism, and Judaism. Though a thorough quantitative analysis was not performed, the general breakdown does not seem to be radically different from the findings of Buddenbaum (1986). Several lines of thought seem worthy of further investigation concerning discrepancies between broad introductions and narrow text. One possible explanation for the results found here is that papers may be feeling pressure to broaden their coverage (whether such pressure is appropriate or not). Headlines are one area in which a "façade" can be presented to the audience. Such a façade would suggest that the papers wish to avoid flack, but do not wish to make significant changes in editorial content. Related to this idea, further investigation might determine that newsgathering routines are slow to change behind the personal values of those in the news industry. If so, the normal sources to whom the reporters turn to get the bulk of the story information would be more "traditional" in their religious outlook. If alternative belief systems are less formal and less visible, they will be less common in the text, even if editors claim them in headlines.

This ties in well with the third significant finding that is worthy of further study. In spite of the fact that many of these stories were framed around "the religious" of America (a opposed to "religious leaders"), the sources cited in the stories were overwhelmingly representatives of

formal organizations rather than rank-and-file members of religious bodies. Though I suggested that this was a common practice in coverage of other types of organizations it seems inappropriate in this context. One might wonder if there are significant differences in reliance on organizational versus individual sources in different forms of stories. That is, if the journalist were writing a story about faith in God's healing power, would the number of congregants (as opposed to clergy or other church officials) used as sources be higher than in a story about a thorny theological issue being voted on by a specific religious body?

Such theological debates are important and worthy of news coverage. When they are covered, one might expect that church officials would be widely cited. The fourth and final key finding of this study relates to this. Theological disputes were not shunned in the articles examined here. In fact this set of stories seems to indicate that for some reason reporters were willing to use theological disputes more than political battles as a means of manifesting conflict in their stories. Granted, one might argue that the reporters have simply envisioned such disputes as a form of "partisan politics" and thus find it dramatic. However, much of the drama was taken out of the politics in these stories, as lines were not clearly drawn in the dispute and both sides were not presented clearly. If the goal were to present the drama of denominational conflict, one might expect that each side would be given clear voice.

Though completely speculative, we might wonder if the lack of voice in this case is because of affinity reporters might have with those who are encouraging religion (and especially the Christian church) to become more green. Lichter, Rothman and Lichter's (1986) portrayal of media workers as more liberal than their neighbors might be worth further examination here. This work is contested (for example, Clark and Hoover, 1997), but still worth considering in this

light. If reporters in the mainstream press *do* tend to rally for traditionally liberal causes such as environmentalism, one might expect them to be positive about a leftward movement on the part of a group with whom they often disagree. In this instance, one might also expect reporters to use novelty (to create a sense of enthusiasm for change) as opposed to conflict as a primary news value. Moreover, where conflict would seem inherent, we might see attempts made to diminish its importance by avoiding traditional patterns of bifurcation. Finally, if one wanted the movement to succeed, proponents of the new view should be exalted, while those who contest this view should remain silent.

Though no thorough rhetorical analysis was provided here, the text certainly invites such. At this juncture, we simply know that the media have latched on to what they perceive as an important phenomenon within American religion. They have taken numerous opportunities to remind us of this phenomenon, and have presented it to us in a way that makes it broad, "official" and lacking in conflict. The reasons for this portrayal as opposed to alternatives are worthy of more than speculation.

TABLE 1

Timeline and Headlines	
DATE OF PUBLICATION	**HEADLINE**
Watanabe, Teresa December 25, 1998	The Green Movement is Getting Religious; As more of the faithful embrace the protection of God's creations as a sacred cause, they are reshaping the once-secular face of environmentalism.
Murphy, Caryle February 3, 1998	A Spiritual Lens On the Environment: Increasingly, Caring for Creation Is Viewed as a Religious Mandate
Gerstenzang, James February 6, 1997	Environment; Religious Groups Join Hands to Protect the Gifts of Nature
Gonzalez, David November 6, 1994	Religions are Putting Faith in Environmentalism
Niebuhr, Gustav April 23, 1994	Interfaith environmentalism: Ecology movement begins to take root among the religious
Stepp, Laura Sessions May 16, 1990	Modern Garden of Eden Endangered: Churches trying to mobilize faithful on environmental issues
Chandler, Russell April 19, 1990	Religions Join the Crusade to Save Earth From Pollution

TABLE 2

Reporters and Themes	
REPORTER	THEME
Watanabe, Teresa	The environmental debate, long dominated by a secular conservation movement based on scientific rather than theological arguments, is being dramatically reshaped by the fervent forces of God.
Murphy, Caryle	Like McCarthy, Americans of all faiths increasingly are looking at the environment through a spiritual lens. For them, "care for creation" is much more than preserving wildlife and pristine scenery. It is a religious mandate.
Gerstenzang, James	The mission is both simple and daunting: to look at the nation's environment from a theological perspective. It offers the simplicity of a freshwater spring, the daunting scope of the disciplines of faith to which humanity turns to find its place in the universe.
Gonzalez, David	More and more religious groups nationwide are choosing to renew – or begin – an examination of their responsibility to the environment.
Niebuhr, Gustav	As Americans mark the 24th anniversary this weekend of the first celebration of Earth Day, the idea that religious people have a special responsibility to care for the planet is spreading.
Stepp, Laura Sessions	These same leaders are starting to encourage Americans to rethink the Bible stories they grew up with, to think of themselves not as masters of the natural world but partners with it.
Chandler, Russell	Organized religion has joined the front lines of the environmental movement, providing a potential army of hundreds of thousands of activists for the fight to save the Earth.

TABLE 3

Categories and Number of Sources	
CATEGORY	NUMBER OF QUOTED SOURCES
Clergy	16
Religious Affiliated Organizations	17
Traditional Environmental Organizations	5
Government Official/Politician	4
Religious Congregant	3
Other or Indiscernible	12

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COMMUNICATION IN RELIGIOUS LOBBYING:

MAKING MEANING THROUGH JOURNALISM

A Paper Presented to the Religion and Media Interest Group at the Annual Convention of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication,
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ABSTRACT

"Communication in Religious Lobbying: Making Meaning through Journalism" attempted to add to scholarly literature on influence-building strategies used by religious groups in their journalistic discourse. Taking Hofrenning's list of three such strategies (symbolic, language, and coalition-building), the study applied the trio to an organizational publication. The article traced the evolution of Christian Coalition stances on issues of separation of church and state between 1992 and 1996 through content analyzing *Christian American*, the group's official publication. Two hundred news items were coded for agenda, descriptions of non-Christian conservatives, use of Scripture, and sources cited. The study found significant correlations between issue depictions in 1992-3 and 1995-6, suggesting cycles with first years emphasizing controversial stances on reforming American government into a Christian image, followed by years focusing on widening Christian access to public forums and other issues with appeal beyond the religious community. Coalition electoral success in 1994 was linked to the incorporation of a secularly focused agenda, friendlier terminology for non-Christian conservatives, and a broad-based list of sources used to portray and justify positions. The study concluded that the group of religious conservatives used varying issue emphases, contexts and alliances to mobilize followers. The organization gravitated toward a political rather than religious agenda, and increased the secularization of its messages over time.

INTRODUCTION

Social movements matter in politics. Their appearance may mark major changes in society (Kegley and Wittkopf, 1988), and their evolution into the political superstructure can shift the terms and conditions of policy debates (Truman, 1962; Fox, 1995). These changing, growing sociopolitical entities, frequently incorporating overt or subtle moral and religious themes, attempt to present a united front to a hostile world. However, the front may mask real differences within the movement or group (Brettschneider, 1996).

Therefore, the choices shaping social movements entering into institutional political action can have important impacts upon society and politics. Studying the timing and impact of these choices can tell us something about the ways such entities mobilize followers, prioritize issues, and achieve or fail to achieve success in the political process.

Organization is thought to be a crucial element to the success of a social movement (Oberschall, 1978). Communication within movement organizations is critical, with the intragroup publication serving as a way to unite scattered followers through stressing common beliefs and shared goals (Snowball, 1991).

This study examined the alternatives and strategies employed in political communication by religious conservatism, a prominent social movement evolving over the past 20 years into an institutionally oriented political entity (Wuthnow, 1983). Religion has long been considered an important factor determining voting patterns (Ladd, 1997).

Christian Coalition, founded in 1989 by religious broadcaster Pat Robertson, sought to capitalize on upheaval caused by social changes and political realignment. Its work brought it recognition as one of the major power centers in the Republican Party and politics in general (Persinos, 1994). Through analyzing Christian Coalition's organizational publication, *Christian American*, this study attempted to identify communication patterns leading to impacts on social and political entities and organizational success.

This was done through a framework advanced by Hofrenning (1995) in his work on religious lobbyists in the nation's capital. Interviewing representatives of 32 organizations, he found what may be identified as three primary communication-related methods of influence-building:

1. *Symbolic strategy.* Symbols, such as catchphrases, communicate quickly and memorably the ideals of a lobbying organization (p. 138). There are two main approaches here: the "insider," which focuses the debate by using narrow, technical terms, and the "outside," which expands meaning through, abstraction and appeal to emotion.

2. *Language.* The type of language used in lobbying and coalition-building is vital to the expansion of contraction of organizational influence (pp. 140-142). Primary elements here are the use of religious language, often seen by religious lobbyists as narrowing organizational appeal, and the attitude of dialogue with outside forces, key to broadening secular support.

3. *Coalition-building.* This was a tactic universally used by religious lobbying organizations (p. 135). The alignments can be "insider," moving toward secular groups, or "outsider," other like-minded religious lobbyists.

By applying these methods and tactics to a specific group and issue, there can be increased understanding of religious aims and nuances not only of lobbying, but also of communication strategies. Further comprehension of the role of organizational publications and other media also may result.

MOVEMENT AND ISSUE BACKGROUND

The religious conservative movement, born out of religious fundamentalism (Martin, 1996), was frequently suspicious of outside forces in its early stages (Wald, 1992; personal communication, Godwin, 1996), but seemed to change during the 1990s into an entity seeking approval from policymakers (i.e., Reed, 1993) and even mass media (Edsall, 1993).

Ralph Reed, both opponents and supporters agree, changed the face of religious conservatism in the United States in eight years as executive director of the Christian Coalition. An obscure doctoral student at Emory University when Pat Robertson asked him to lead the Coalition, Reed transformed it "from a fringe group to one of the most powerful if divisive forces in Republican politics," asserted reporter Katharine Seelye (1997, A16) in *The New York Times* upon his resignation from the organization.

Even Barry Lynn, head of Americans United for Separation of Church and State, paid his longtime foe a backhanded compliment. "Reed has done an absolutely masterful job of bringing religious extremism into American political life," he said (Seelye, 1997: A16).

It is undeniable that Christian Coalition has played a major role in issues affecting the separation of church and state. From support for the government-backed display of religious symbols to opposition to "anti-Christian" federal spending to advocacy for the Religious Freedom Restoration Act and Religious Equality/Liberties Amendment, Reed and the Coalition have made the controversial area a strong point of emphasis.

This study attempted through quantitative means to assess the Coalition's direction on church-state separation, with analysis of policy and rhetorical emphases.

METHOD

In this case, there were three primary research questions investigated through content analysis:

1. What was the Christian Coalition's symbolic strategy for church-state issues?

The theme communicated by articles reflected "insider" or "outsider" messages, seeking to work within or upon the system, respectively. The timeline began with 1992, the year of the Coalition's first major mobilization, and concluded with 1996, the last year for a complete tally of organizational messages. Annual totals were measured to assess variability.

2. How did the Coalition use language concerning church-state separation?

Organizational messages should reflect the attitude the Coalition wished to impart to its membership toward certain groups and policy stances. This examined both use of religious language in communicating positions as well as attitude toward outsiders.

3. Whom did the Coalition perceive as its allies and opponents in church-state issues?

Clues to the changing nature of the Coalition on church-state issues were discovered in studying which "insider" and "outsider" groups and individuals it cited in making its points and assailing its opposition. This tackled Hofrenning's notation of coalition-building as a primary tool of religious organizations.

Study material consisted of all news items on church-state issues appearing from 1992 through 1996 in *Christian American*, the Christian Coalition's 9- to 12-times-yearly official publication. Previous research on groups of religious conservatives has found the organizations' in-house organs to be dependable reflections of leadership priorities (Snowball, 1991). They also have been predictive of the topic and tone of subsequent treatment of the groups by secular media (Huckins, 1999).[1] Interviews with *Christian American* staffers indicated Reed, the executive director, held tight control of the publication, both in topics and tone (personal communication, Ebert, 1997; English, 1996; Wheeler, 1996).

Church-state issues were defined as those "concerned with the relationship of the church and/or religious values to organized local, city, county, state, or federal governments." A news item had to have a specific religious or church link to qualify.

Once identified, these items were coded into ten mutually exclusive categories:

1. Rationale for Christian involvement in government. Reasons for Christians to desire positions in or influence upon government, including exhortations for churches and individual Christians to become involved in organizations, protests, or political campaigns.

2. Christian rights in the workplace. Defense of workplace display of religious articles, allowance of prayer time, holding of spiritual beliefs, or right to speak out on topics of moral importance.

3. The right of Christian access to the marketplace or marketplace of ideas. Defending the rights of Christians as a whole to participate equally in politics or other public forums by sending religious or moral messages. This category included coverage of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act and Religious Equality/Liberties Amendment, since the Coalition viewed these efforts as essentially defensive measures guaranteeing access and expression.

4. Defense of Christian organizations. Specific cases of defending Christian-oriented political or moral groups or churches against physical or rhetorical attack by individuals, organizations, or the government.

5. Promoting America's Christian heritage. Recalling the religious principles of the "Founding Fathers," Constitution, or other promotion of the history of the U.S. as a "Christian nation."

6. Opposition to "anti-Christian" government spending. Decrying any level of government for spending public monies on items or causes against perceived Christian values.

7. Promotion of prayer or Bible teaching in the public schools. Restoring mandatory prayer in public schools or defending their existing programs of prayer or Bible teaching.

8. Promoting Christian activism in public schools. Support for Christian-oriented programs in public schools not involving prayer or the Bible.

9. Protests of morality. Religion-based protests of abortion, pornography, etc.

10. Defending public or government displays or endorsements of religion. The display of religious articles on government property; announcement of religiously oriented special days; the endorsement by public officials of specific religious doctrines, values, or institutions.

Several measures were used to answer the last two research questions. Each news item was coded for sources, that is, each individual, group, or document supplying information, and whether this source supported, opposed, or was neutral to the Coalition. This developed a picture of the Coalition's allies and opponents.

Adjectives and adverbs applied to non-religious conservatives (defined as those not described in the articles as allied with the Coalition or other known religious conservative groups) were coded positive, negative, or neutral, comprising a category on terminology. This was the measure for attitude of language toward outsiders. Additionally, references to deity or Scripture as promotions of positions also were counted, examining the usage of religious language.

Trained coders were used to content analyze the issues of *Christian American*, and achieved intercoder reliability of at least .90 on all items tested (formula described by Holsti, 1969).

RESULTS

The content analysis found 200 news items concerning the separation of church and state in issues of *Christian American* between 1992 and 1996. The data were formed into tables and appropriate statistical measures applied to answer the study's three research questions.

1. What was the Christian Coalition's symbolic strategy for church-state issues?

There have been two major cycles of issue emphasis by the Christian Coalition in this area, as indicated by Table I. In this figure, the percentages are of the total of church-state items that year, while the numbers in parentheses are that particular issue's ranking among the ten in that year of study. Percentages at the bottom of each column show church-state issues as a proportion of all items in *Christian American*.

The first cycle, 1992-1993, saw the Coalition strongly shift its church-state priorities, perhaps because of the disastrous presidential election in which the group's top personnel were highly visible. Before the election, its highest-profile concerns tended to promote a specifically Christian government and educational environment to the exclusion of other belief systems. What might be dubbed the five "outsider" categories (putting prayer back in public schools, protecting governmental displays and endorsements of religious values and symbols, protests of morality, defending the church and other Christian organizations, and opposition to "anti-Christian" government spending) accounted for 69.2% of all church-state issues.

Table I *CHRISTIAN AMERICAN* CHURCH-STATE AGENDAS, 1992-1996

Issue	1992		1993		1994		1995		1996	
Rationale for Political Involvement	(7)[a]	7.7%[b]	(3.5)	12.5%	(2.5)	12.5%	(8.5)	3.7%	(2)	26.3%
Christian Rights in the Workplace	(7)	7.7	(10)	3.1	(2.5)	12.5	(8.5)	3.7	(6)	5.3
Christian Access	(2.5)	15.4	(1.5)	17.2	(1)	26.6	(2.5)	18.5	(1)	36.8
Defense of Christian Organizations	(2.5)	15.4	(7)	7.8	(7.5)	6.3	(5.5)	7.4	(6)	5.3
America's Christian Heritage	(10)	0.0	(3.5)	12.5	(9.5)	4.7	(8.5)	3.7	(6)	5.3
Opposition to "Anti-Christian" Government Spending	(7)	7.7	(7)	7.8	(9.5)	4.7	(8.5)	3.7	(6)	5.3
School Prayer/ Bible Teaching	(2.5)	15.4	(5)	9.4	(7.5)	6.3	(2.5)	18.5	(6)	5.3
General Education Concerns	(9)	3.8	(1.5)	17.2	(4.5)	9.4	(5.5)	7.4	(3)	10.5
Protests of Morality	(5)	11.5	(9)	4.7	(4.5)	9.4	(4)	11.1	(9.5)	0.0
Defending Govt. Displays/Endorsements of Religion	(2.5)	15.4	(7)	7.8	(6)	7.8	(1)	22.2	(9.5)	0.0
	n=26		n=64		n=64		n=27		n=19	
Church-state/ Percentage of Overall Issues in Publication	12.8%		21.5%		22.4%		15.8%		14.5%	

Spearman's rank-order correlations: 1992-1993, -.112; 1992-1994, .200; 1992-1995, .797 ($p<.01$); 1992-1996, -.061; 1993-1994, .173; 1993-1995, .145; 1993-1996, .779 ($p<.01$); 1994-1995, .203; 1994-1996, .509 ($p<.20$); 1995-1996, -.130

[a]()=Yearly issues rank.

[b]Percentages are of total news items that year.

In 1993, after the election, the same categories comprised only 37.5% of the total, little more than half the previous figure. That year's primary issues became general school concerns (including multiculturalism and outcome-based education) and the access of Christians to voice their concerns in public forums. These two categories are much less confrontational in nature, and emphasize "insider" inclusion of a Christian point of view rather than exclusion of competing worldviews.

This finding matches the results of an overall survey of issues featured in *Christian American*. From 1992 to 1993, its pages moved away from controversial social issues (e.g., abortion, gay rights, censorship) to mainstream social issues (taxes, education, crime), essentially inverting their priority in print (Huckins, 1996).[2] Publication personnel have said this strong change in agenda came from Reed himself (personal communication, English, 1996; Wheeler, 1996).[3]

This cycle repeated in 1995-1996, in the wake of media and political plaudits for the Coalition's role in the midterm elections of 1994, which put Republicans in control of the U.S. House of Representatives for the first time in 40 years. The strongest Spearman's rank-order correlations are between 1992 and 1995, .797 ($p<.01$), and 1993 and 1996, .779 ($p<.01$). These are both highly statistically significant.

A possible explanation for the replication of the cycle is that the Coalition sought to turn its election (or "insider") clout into policy gains by shifting back to an activist "outsider" agenda. Reed appeared with House Speaker Newt Gingrich in a much-reported news conference announcing the group's "Contract with the American Family" in spring 1995, as the Coalition sought to put into law ten measures ranging from abortion restrictions to cutting off funds for the National Endowment for the Arts to tax relief for families. While a few Christian conservatives wished the group had demanded more, church-state separationists viewed it as an attempt to dictate social policy (Curtis, 1995).[4]

The 1996 agenda, contained in *Christian American*'s new slick magazine format, returned to the more defensive posture of post-debacle 1993. Stressing access and putting forth rationales for Christians running for office and working in political campaigns ("insider" categories) accounted for 63.2% of all items that year, while, for the first time, the publication's pages contained no news on either protests of morality or public endorsements of religion.

This also may have been part of an evolving "election-year strategy" by the Coalition. There is a moderate, if not statistically significant, correlation between the church-state issue agendas of 1994 and 1996 (.509). Many discrepancies between the two years involved the shrinking of the issues base, as 1994 included a broader variety of church-state topics. Still, the five "outsider" categories totaled 34.4% of items in 1994, and 15.9% in 1996, indicating something more substantial might have been at work.

2. How did the Coalition use language concerning church-state separation?

Language concerning non-religious conservative forces in church-state items, shown in Table II, seems to be used in election-year cycles. The means for 1992 and 1994 are near-identical, as are those between 1993 and 1995. In each case, the difference in means from the year immediately previous is extremely statistically significant ($p<.001$). This trend is only broken in 1996, when the mean remained virtually the same as 1995.

Table II TERMINOLOGY DESCRIBING NON-CHRISTIAN CONSERVATIVES IN *CHRISTIAN AMERICAN*, 1992-1996

Tone	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996
Positive	12.7%	10.1%	15.1%	15.8%	8.2%
Negative	50.0	61.9	54.6	68.4	67.1
Neutral	37.3 n=102	28.1 n=278	30.3 n=218	15.8 n=57	24.7 n=73
Mean[a]:	1.63	1.48	1.61	1.47	1.41
Significance[b]:		p<.001	p<.001	p<.001	p<.22

[a]Positive=3, neutral=2, negative=1. [b]Significance tests are on the mean of the previous year.

While terminology toward non-religious conservatives is never very positive, election-year descriptors are less negative and more likely to be neutral, that is, pursing the "insider" strategy. Off-year differences could be due to efforts to keep activists interested and involved through a lack of electoral excitement, in an "outsider" vein. Again, 1996 is the exception here.

More promising, perhaps, is the observation that when the symbolic strategy (Table I) is less confrontational and language (Table II) more "insider" in orientation, electoral success results, as it did in 1994. In 1992, the symbolic strategy was "outsider" and terminology relatively the same, and success was elusive for the Coalition, as it was in 1996, when the inverse was true.

Trends in references to deity or Scripture, shown in Table III, tend toward the explanation that Reed and Coalition leaders were playing a game of cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957); that is, broadening their "insider" nature while using language in the newspaper to keep up stirrings among the faithful as "outsiders." This is advanced by interviews with Coalition officials, who concede a move toward more secular language over time (Huckins, 1996).

However, an alternative hypothesis is also possible, that religious references may make relatively little difference in evaluation of a message, held up by Huckins' (1998) comparisons of religious right and left across elite media.

The other parallel to Table II comes in the change in depiction in 1996, when spiritual references fell precipitously, breaking the extraordinary stability of the previous three years. It may have been a year of major reformation of the Coalition message.

Table III REFERENCES TO DEITY OR SCRIPTURE IN *CHRISTIAN AMERICAN*, 1992-1996

	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996
References per Item	.88	1.02	1.02	1.04	.632
	n=23	n=65	n=65	n=28	n=12
Significance[a]		p<.0002			p<.0002

[a]Significance tests are on the mean of the previous year.

3. Whom did the Coalition perceive as its allies and opponents in church-state issues?

Findings both fit cyclical theories advanced previously and show in detail Coalition relationships with individuals and organizations. Entries in Table IV reflect the raw number of mentions followed by a translation of that number into the percentage of supportive or oppositional citations that year. This controls for the overall 2-1 ratio of supportive to oppositional sources.

The cyclical theory enjoys at least some confirmation from these numbers. Comparing the first years of the cycles to their second years, *Christian American* 1992 and 1995 allies were more likely to be "outsiders," that is, Christian organizations and religious leaders, while in 1993 and 1996, secular "insider:" groups (especially the GOP) tended to dominate. Christian Coalition leaders spoke on the record mainly in the latter years. First-year opposition came from courts, judges and the American Civil Liberties Union ("insiders"), but second-year foes were more often religious leaders ("outsiders").

Overtly religious actors generally were championed and secular forces vilified in the first years, changing places in the second. This has a certain logic; the sources for arguing a particular agenda must go with that agenda, while the language used to advance those issues may be manipulated. It also follows the "insider"-"outsider" balance.

Once again, 1994 was a mainstreaming year. There was relative balance in addressing school concerns, court judgments, and religious leaders, moderation on Christian organizations and the ACLU, and a cease-fire with Americans United for Separation of Church and State. Most noticeable, though, are the extreme imbalances in references to political parties. By wide margins, Christian Coalition's primary foe was the Democratic Party, its top supporter the Republican Party.

Moving to observations on the individual or organizational level, the treatment of the parties contrasts markedly. During the five years, Democrats were nine times more likely to be counted opponents than allies; President Clinton and his administration received only one positive mention to 13 negative. He, former U.S. Senator Howell Heflin, and former Pennsylvania Governor William Casey were the only members of the party ever cited as favorable sources.

Table IV SELECTED ALLIES AND OPPONENTS DEPICTED IN *CHRISTIAN AMERICAN*, 1992-1996

Entity[a]		1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	
School	[b](S)	7 (14.0%)	17 (11.1%)	11 (7.1%)	5 (8.8%)	1 (2.9%)	Officials
	(O)	1 (2.9%)	14 (15.1%)	7 (10.0%)	1 (6.7%)	1 (5.6%)	
Courts/	(S)	3 (6.0)	5 (3.3)	9 (5.8)	4 (7.0)	6 (17.1)	
Judges	(O)	7 (20.6)	4 (4.3)	4 (5.7)	2 (13.3)	1 (5.6)	
Media	(S)	1 (2.0)	13 (8.5)	15 (9.7)	3 (5.3)	0 (0.0)	
	(O)	2 (5.9)	10 (10.8)	3 (4.3)	2 (13.3)	4 (22.2)	
Dem.	(S)	0 (0.0)	1 (0.7)	2 (1.3)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	
Pols.	(O)	1 (2.9)	6 (6.5)	20 (28.6)	1 (6.7)	0 (0.0)	
Repub.	(S)	0 (0.0)	14 (9.2)	32 (20.6)	2 (3.5)	5 (14.3)	
Pols.	(O)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	3 (4.3)	0 (0.0)	1 (5.6)	
Religious	(S)	11 (22.0)	14 (9.2)	18 (11.6)	6 (10.5)	1 (2.9)	
Leaders	(O)	1 (2.9)	3 (3.2)	5 (7.1)	0 (0.0)	3 (16.7)	
Chr. Org.	(S)	7 (14.0)	8 (5.2)	11 (7.1)	7 (15.8)	1 (2.9)	
ACLU	(S)	0 (0.0)	1 (0.7)	1 (0.6)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	
	(O)	4 (11.8)	8 (8.6)	2 (2.9)	2 (13.3)	1 (5.6)	
AU	(O)	5 (14.7)	7 (7.5)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	1 (5.6)	
ACLJ	(S)	2 (4.0)	6 (3.9)	6 (3.9)	1 (1.8)	1 (2.9)	
C. Coal.	(S)	3 (6.0)	14 (9.2)	11 (7.1)	1 (1.8)	13 (37.1)	
Total	(S)	50 (56.2%)	153 (55.4%)	155(60.8%)	57 (61.3%)	35 (52.2%)	
	(O)	34 (38.2)	93 (33.7)	70 (27.5)	15 (16.1)	18 (26.9)	
	[c](N)	5 (5.6)	30 (10.9)	30 (11.8)	21 (22.6)	14 (20.9)	
		n=89	n=276	n=255	n=93	n=67	

[a]"Dem. Pols."= Democratic Politicians; "Repub. Pols."=Republican Politicians; "Chr. Org."=Christian Organizations; "C.Coal"=Christian Coalition.

[b](S)=supportive; (O)=opposing; (N)=neutral.

[c]Neutral references are not specifically addressed here because of their infrequent and scattered nature. Forty-five of the 100 were historical figures, neutral by definition. Among these were George Washington, 5; Abraham Lincoln, 4; William O. Douglas, 3.

In contrast, Republicans were 13 times more likely to be mentioned as supporters than opponents. Top backers included former President Ronald Reagan, cited five times, and House Majority Leader Dick Armey, four.

Until 1996, religious leaders were mainstays of support for the Coalition. These allies came primarily from three denominations: Catholics, 30%; Baptists (mainly Southern), 16%; and Presbyterian (Presbyterian Church in America or Orthodox), 14%. Non-denominational or evangelical clergy accounted for 24% of favorable sources among religious leaders. Individual favorites were the Southern Baptist Convention's Richard Land, Chuck Colson of Prison Fellowship, and the Presbyterian Church in America's Peter Marshall and D. James Kennedy.

The opposition showed no particular trend, but included, at various times, the Rev. Al Sharpton, the National Council of Churches, and the Rev. Jerry Falwell (Reed, 1994).[5]

State and federal courts and judges evolved into allies between 1992 and 1996. Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia, a Roman Catholic, was the most frequently used favorable source (four times), with Chief Justice William Rehnquist and Justice Anthony Kennedy also cited (once each). Students and their parents were more likely to be supporters than school boards, but the National Education Association and its affiliates were most often in opposition. Media were less likely than average to be friends of the Coalition than foes, although the *Washington Post* and *Wall Street Journal* did win multiple positive references.

The nature of the Christian Coalition's relationships with other Christian-oriented activist groups changed dramatically. Where the Traditional Values Coalition and Operation Rescue stood in 1992 and 1993, the Family Research Council and lower-profile local and regional action organizations occupied territory in 1994 and 1995 before the secularly dominated issues of 1996.

The American Civil Liberties Union, with 17 citations, was the single most consistent opponent among sources cited in church-state items in *Christian American*.[6] Coming in second was Americans United for Separation of Church and State, once described by the publication as "fomenting hostility toward conservative Christianity" (Wheeler 1993, 6).

Christian Coalition leaders' involvement in news items was cyclical with variations among individuals. Reed accounted for 38% of Coalition citations, founder Robertson only 2%. Intraorganizational sources dominated in latter years of the church-state cycle, but the unusually heavy percentage of "inside" mentions in 1996 may have signaled a trend toward more regularly insular views as well as further integration of broadness of symbolic strategy and language.

CONCLUSION

The content analysis of the Christian Coalition's emphasis on church-state issues showed great variance over the five years studied. Tracing this agenda through *Christian American*, the official publication of the Coalition, resulted in evidence of at least two distinct cycles on topics of separation of religion and government. Data suggest election results played crucial roles in each.

What might be termed the "original" church-state symbolic strategy of the organization, stressing an "outsider" approach, was replaced after the 1992 elections by a more "insider" posture based on increasing Christian access to public forums. The resultant agenda, joined by efforts to "mainstream" the Coalition message and build bridges to the Republican Party, may have contributed to the group's success in the 1994 elections.

That success could have convinced Coalition leadership to attempt to put its "original" goals into place, as the 1992 and 1995 agendas correlated to a highly significant degree. The "Contract with the American Family" largely bogged down in Congress, though (Hosansky, 1996), and the approaching presidential election may have led to a re-implementation of the 1993 strategy in 1996, as these two years' agendas correlated highly.

Language choice in *Christian American* news items on church-state separation seemed to follow an election-year cycle. Terms in 1992 and 1994 were significantly more positive toward "insiders" than those used in 1993 and 1995. The year 1996 broke this cycle, as tone remained negative. Use of Scripture turned upward in 1993 and stayed strong until 1996, when a highly significant downturn came.

The Coalition achieved its greatest electoral success when its agenda bent toward a broad, "insider" audience and its tone was more positive toward same; that combination occurred only in 1994. The unification of agenda and tone may be more likely given the 1996 data, as Coalition leadership was more frequently cited, Scripture and ties with religious leaders weakened, and issues became less confrontational, mainly "insider" trends.

Religious conservatism, well outside the political mainstream at the dawn of its issues-consciousness in the 1970s, would appear from the data to be moving inside the institutional norms of the American political scene. Rather than following the timeless religious calendar, Christian Coalition seems to have followed a party-politics schedule, moving with the tides of partisanship. The organizational publication reflected changes in its political positioning, issue emphasis, and even religious orientation.

The three-pronged approach based on Hofrenning's identification of symbolic strategy, language and coalition-building seemed a useful way to use organizational publications to analyze changes in group orientation. The significant shifts in yearly depictions provided quantitative evidence of his qualitatively noted trends. Replication of this model with other organizational publications as well as news releases and other group pronouncements would be helpful in buttressing this position.

The secularization of *Christian American* and, by inference, Christian Coalition, is a shift noted in other religious media and entities. Analysts and studies (Ferré 1990; Romanowski 1990) have noted that the audience for the "pure" message of religious conservatism tends to be too small to support long-term, systematic media efforts and other outreaches, so the trend often is toward a non-religious "insider" audience.

This study indicates that, with regard to Christian Coalition, progression of religious conservatism from alternative social movement to institutional politics is reasonably complete. It would be intriguing to see additional studies on communication patterns of organizations coming from social movements inside and outside religion.

NOTES

1. Correlations exceeded .82 ($p<.001$) for both 1992 and 1994 issues of *Christian American* and subsequent secular media articles on the Christian Coalition.

2. Controversial social issues dropped from 47.5% in 1992 to 24.7% in 1993, while mainstream social issues increased from 14.8% to 30.8%.

3. Wheeler, the former editor, related that Reed laboriously went over page proofs of the publication, changing articles and headlines to reflect his point of view.

4. The Rev. Jerry Falwell and Martin Mawyer's Christian Action Network also presented "Contracts," somewhat more concerned with controversial social issues than the Coalition's but no more successful.

5. Reed called "ugly" Falwell's 1980s comment on God not hearing the prayers of Jews.

6. Pat Robertson's ACLJ, the American Center for Law and Justice, virtually mirrored its secular cousin. Both garnered references in all five years, totaling 17 for the ACLU and 16 for ACLJ. The Rutherford Institute, an ACLJ "competitor," had only five citations.

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